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Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Maude,
"the Man of Mesopotamia."

THE WAR IN THE
CRADLE OF THE WORLD

MESOPOTAMIA

BY
ELEANOR FRANKLIN EGAN

ILLUSTRATED

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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CHAPTER I

THE LONGEST WAY ROUND

THE only thrill to be enjoyed on a voyage across the Pacific in these perilous days is provided by the stormy petrel. When that extraordinary bird stretches its black neck up in preparation for a swift skimming flight across the surface of the sea, it looks enough like a periscope to produce a slight quiver in the fear-centre of even the traveller who has learned in real sea danger zones to be steady-nerved and casual.

Rumours of submarines and raiders in the Pacific are practically continuous, but one pays very little attention to them. An encounter with a raider is not to be so greatly dreaded in any case, and my own placid sense of safety all the way over was due largely to my belief that no submarine would dare to venture into the zone through which we chose to travel, even though it might be able to get past the naval watch of many nations.

Midsummer though it happened to be, there were days when our northern horizon was saw-toothed with Arctic ice mountains, and all the time we sat huddled in rugs and furs in sheltered corners of the deck, or sought comfort in the snug library away from marrow-chilling winds.

When the winds were still, cold fogs would rise and the great horn would begin to bellow. It was not pleasant, but it was to be preferred to the taut suspense one suffers on the seas where the U-boat is known to bear one company. Yet I must hasten to record that this route was not chosen for any reason except that it is the shortest one between

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the Pacific coast of North America and the shores of Japan.

When we started down the western curve of the great half-circle that we cut across the ocean there were days when we had no horizon at all, so completely enveloping the fog was. And it seemed to me as though, wrapped in mist, we were steaming farther and farther away from the war and all that the war means to the world that is suffering its consequences.

And so we were. At any rate, one got an instant and inescapable impression that Japan is farther from the war than any other great country involved, and that she has realised it least of all. That is, she has suffered little. But her observable extraordinary gains and material developments are sufficient to fill a returning lover of her beauties and charm with a definite sense of loss.

The last time I sailed out of Yokohama harbour Fujiyama 'came down to the sea.' So I knew that sooner or later I should return.

Ordinarily that justly famed mountain stands afar off, a white-crested glory seen across miles of grey roofs, of glistening rice-fields and soft, low hills. And too often it is hidden away for weeks on end in banks of cloud. But on very clear days, and especially in winter, it seems sometimes to come very close and to hover in the foreground of one's vision in compelling and almost overwhelming majesty. Truly, it is not an overrated mountain.

Lucky for you, if you like Japan, that you leave Japan on such a day. Because if Fuji does not lift her head out of the clouds long enough at least to speed you on your way you will never return. Which is a thing to be believed.

And I believed it. I have believed it for many years. Time and again I have sailed away from Yokohama, and always, without fail, shining Fuji has shone for me. And always I have said :

THE LONGEST WAY ROUND

‘Yes, of course, I shall return !’

For the thirteenth time I landed within the far-flung circle of Fuji’s radiance. It was my thirteenth time in Japan ; it was thirteen years almost to the day since I landed the first time ; Japan was the thirteenth Allied country I had visited since the war began ; and it was the thirteenth day of the month !

Yet I was on my way with a fixed intention of doing a thing I knew could not be done.

I was going to Baghdad !

I had mentioned to nobody the fact that I was going to Baghdad, because I dreaded the necessity for having afterward to explain why I didn’t do it. I said I was going out East, and I intimated that I might go to India. But even about that there was some doubt, since India also was closed to visitors on account of certain war-time dangers that a too lax hospitality might serve to increase.

In order, however, that there may be no mystery with regard to my methods of procedure, I beg to acknowledge now my debt of gratitude to the late Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, then British Ambassador at Washington, a friend who believed I was to be trusted within war-restricted areas.

His Excellency provided me with a special British passport, and, in my behalf, sent letters or cablegrams to most of His Majesty’s ambassadors and colonial governors from Tokio to Bombay. And, needless to say, all His Majesty’s representatives—Sir Conyingham Greene, Ambassador to Tokio ; Sir Henry May, Governor of Hong-Kong ; Sir Arthur Young, Governor of Singapore ; and Lord Willingdon, Governor of Bombay—treated me with the distinguished courtesy and consideration that one accepts from British gentlemen as one accepts any other wholly natural manifestation of the nature of things. It is due that at the outset I record the fact of my absolute reliance upon their

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kindness and confidence and my profound gratitude to them.

After a ten days' interval of almost iniquitous ease on a great Japanese liner I landed at Manila, and there I transhipped for Hong-Kong to an Australian freighter which was misleadingly advertised as providing 'passenger accommodations.' But it was quite all right. The dear old tub crossed the unmannerly China Sea in the wake of the worst typhoon of the season at the dizzying pace of at least six knots an hour, and she was not more than two days late when she came up in the lee of that islanded wonder-world off the Chinese coast—Hong-Kong—the terminal port in the Far East for all transpacific shipping.

I remember a time when one could go to Hong-Kong without troubling to look up ship schedules and be perfectly certain of getting away in almost any direction within a day or two at most.

Did one want to go to the United States? Very well, there was a possibility of connecting two or three times a week with some big eighteen- or twenty-thousand-ton ship for San Francisco, Seattle, or Vancouver. To India, or to Europe *via* the Suez Canal? One had a choice which made earnest competition for one's patronage necessary to a dozen companies. There were British ships and American ships and French ships and Italian ships and Spanish ships and Dutch ships and Japanese ships, to say nothing of the Austrian Lloyd ships to Trieste. There were even Norwegians and Danes. But above all there were Germans, the Norddeutscher Lloyd and the Hamburg-Amerika companies owning some of the best ships that sailed the Eastern seas and enjoying a patronage that no German of any generation now living will ever see re-established.

But what a difference now! The elimination of the German and Austrian ships alone would have

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been enough, but most of the British and French ships, too, have been withdrawn for service elsewhere. There are no longer any Italians or Danes or Norwegians, while the Dutch, being restricted on the Suez Canal route and dreading the perils of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, are sending their ships across the Pacific. It is difficult to believe that the Eastern seas could be so emptied.

According to the original sailing directions which I issued to myself, I was to have left Hong-Kong on a French liner of considerable tonnage and luxury of equipment. But the Germans sank her in the Mediterranean on her way out to the East, so I had to change my plans. This involved angling in the still waters of official reticence for information as to further possibilities, and it took time.

The information that there would be a Britisher along in about two weeks was given to me in great confidence, and I was expected to pretend in a general kind of way that I had no idea when or how I was ever to get out of Hong-Kong in the direction I wished to go. The British ship would go to Singapore, they told me, and from there to Colombo and Bombay. Which was quite satisfactory, as far as I was concerned. And I could have a cabin to Bombay for the small price of a *suite de luxe* on a gold-plated *Aquitania*. All right. I wanted to get to Bombay more than I wanted to do anything else in the world at the moment, and I did not object to going all the way by sea instead of par-boiling myself on an Indian train from Madras or Calcutta at the height of India's hot season.

CHAPTER II

THE SHORTEST WAY THERE

OUR ship was a curious old relic of somebody's marine scrapheap, and I climbed her gangway with all my natural fondness for luxurious surroundings carefully stowed away in the depths of my inner consciousness. But she was the best Britisher left on the run down the coast of Asia, so I was not just being conversationally agreeable when I told the captain the first day out that I was glad to be aboard. I really was ; and, though I knew that only a short time before a ship had been sunk in the Bay of Bengal, I felt a sense of perfect security.

Subsequent life-belt drills, the sight of out-swinging life-boats, loosened rafts, and rope ladders suspended from the deck rails may have given me a few inward qualms, but good ship manners forbid even a reference to a feeling of nervousness these days. We laughed at the intricacies of our life-preservers and made a kind of bugaboo play out of all the grim preparations for an emergency. The old battle-grey merchantman was not steering a straight course for the port I wanted to make, but she was headed in the right general direction, and when it comes to sea-voyaging the character of Hun war has made that about as much as any one has reason to expect.

The evening before we reached Singapore an Australian who 'travelled for a patent sun-deflecting roof material'—in his own briefly explanatory language—and who filled all the intervals of his daily existence with picturesque invective against

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a pack of unfit officials who had refused to accept him in any capacity for service at the front, held forth to a group of passengers, who had nothing better to do than to listen to him, about ‘some of the prettiest islands in the world’ which lie north from Singapore, and through which a ship must ‘thread its way’ into the harbour. He was going to be up early next morning for a view of them, because nobody could see them too often.

‘And,’ thought I to myself, ‘I, too, will do that highly commendable thing.’

It is my opinion that a lazy attitude toward such things results for a traveller in the kind of fatigue that no traveller should ever feel. In the wide round of the world’s wonders to be bored is to reveal one’s own shameful limitations.

So at the bewitching hour of about half-past five I shook myself out of a sound sleep that I might see ‘the rose light of an equatorial sunrise bathing palm islands afloat on the surface of a silver sea !’

I learned afterward that the Australian had never been there before, and that all the time he was quoting a lot of ‘fine writing’ he had found in a Singapore ‘boost-book’ filled with advertisements of real estate and rubber-plantations. As for ‘threading,’ there was never an island less than a mile away, and when one showed itself at all it was nothing but an indistinct mass in a white equatorial haze. Incidentally, when the rose light of sunrise began to get in its morning’s work it melted the caulking in the seams of the decks.

It was late in the day before the southern horizon—a long, flat, purple line—began to approach us ; then we knew we were getting into Singapore. Ordinarily, it is about a four days’ run from Hong-Kong, and, it being only our eighth day out, we thought we were doing very well indeed.

I asked the captain all kinds of questions. One is not supposed to do this, but one does. In any

THE WAR IN THE CRADLE OF THE WORLD

case, thinking up reasonable answers keeps a captain's mind active ; and in trying not to show how annoyed he is he gets exercise in self-control.

I wanted to know all about the uprising in Singapore—how many were involved in it ; how many were killed ; how many were subsequently shot or hanged ; what influence brought it about ; how much German money it cost ; whether Washington was headquarters and Bernstorff head paymaster ; and whether any German agents had been caught in connection with it. But nobody knows any of these things. Least of all, sea-captains.

There was an insurrection. Everybody knows that, murderous gun-shots having a way of reverberating round the world even in war-time. The British troops of the Singapore garrison had been withdrawn for service in France or Gallipoli or Mesopotamia or East Africa, and only native troops—in whom the Britons had the fullest confidence—were left to guard the colony. It was along late in the afternoon and nearly everybody was at the Country Club. People were playing golf or tennis, or were sitting round in white flannels and frilly frocks, having tea, when suddenly the finely armed and fully equipped native soldiers broke from their barracks, or from wherever they were, and started in to murder every white man, woman, and child in the community. That seems to have been the programme.

Just how it was stopped I do not know ; as all such things are stopped, I suppose—by quick action guided by superior intelligence. There was afterward another kind of shooting, with human targets in squads of so many. And that we know. And we know we feel great pity for the poor misguided offenders. But if one is told the number of those who paid the penalty for armed treason—which proposed to express itself in wholesale murder—one is told also that this is no time to write detailed and definite history. So let nobody in future regard

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this reference as reliable information. Regard it rather as a kind of camouflage background for a reference to the Compulsory-Service Act which was immediately passed by the Singapore Government, and which applies to every man in the colony who is able to hold a gun and see a target.

A number of these men took a hand in the job of putting down the uprising, but it is recorded with a good deal of derision that not one of them ever hit anything he aimed at, so now they all have to spend a certain number of hours each week in military drill and gun practice. They wear smart uniforms, pride themselves on their mature efficiency, and are altogether keen about themselves as a home-guard. They are to be seen in companies almost any afternoon, not at their accustomed golf, but at grilling drill on the hot rifle-ranges out on the hills behind the city.

But that is getting rather ahead of myself. However, I may as well go directly on, though I do rather regret slipping so smoothly in the telling of it through the tedious hours of medical and passport examination at Singapore, and the slow process of being nosed by puffing and hot smoke-belching tugs up against a long dock which lay blistering in the sun. It was 'equatorial,' right enough. One gets tired of that word in these regions, but there is no escaping it. It would be as easy to escape the word 'cold' up at the undefined and fade-away-into-nothing end of Greenland. On the map it is only the distance of a pin-head's width from Singapore to the equator. In reality it is about forty miles.

I saw all the passengers go ashore, and watched an exuberant American woman hurl herself violently into the arms of a handsome British army officer before I did anything else. The British army officer was her husband, of course. Then I decided to go up-town.

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Singapore has been British for a very long time. As a matter of fact, they will have to 'do something about it' at once. On the 29th of January, 1919, it will be just one hundred years old. On that date, in 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles, who had been sent on a voyage of discovery looking to the acquirement of a British port somewhere in this vicinity, landed on the then practically uninhabited island and hoisted the British flag.

The principal thing he discovered—aside from the magnificence of the harbour—was that the Dutch had not nabbed it, which was then, and is now, a thing to wonder at. Though it seems they were under an impression that they had. The island was among the useless and wholly neglected territories of the Sultan of Johore, one Abdul Rahman, and the Sultan of Johore was a mere figurehead upholder of the supremacy of the Dutch, and was supported by them in a way that would have made any defection on his part fatal to his own interests. And at once they said to him :

' Of course our treaties with Your Highness cover the island of Singapura ? '

And His Highness replied, ' Why, certainly they do ! '

But there was a Datto of Johore—a lesser highness—whose name was Temenggong, and Temenggong hated the Dutch. Some persons might write that he liked and admired the English, and that, therefore— But he didn't. He merely hated the Dutch. So he came to Raffles and told him that Abdul Rahman was a usurper ; that he was a younger brother and had no right to the throne ; and that the elder brother and rightful heir, whose name was Tunku Hussein, was over in Riau and powerless to assert his rights.

' Is that so ? ' said Raffles. ' Well, you go right along over and get him ! We're friends of his.'

And Temenggong did it. Whereupon Tunku

THE SHORTEST WAY THERE

Hussein was duly and solemnly proclaimed Sultan of Johore—without reference to the opposition camp—and a treaty was immediately negotiated which gave the Englishmen rights of residence on the island. That was all. Raffles may have had visions of eventual British sovereignty in Singapore—then a city of dreams in nobody's mind but his own—but at the moment he was asking for nothing but the privilege of establishing a trading station and a kind of half-way port between India and the Chinese coast.

The definite occupation of the island by the British did not occur until 1824, and by that time it was a growing concern, wholly British in character, with a dozen or more European business firms solidly established, and with a population of more than ten thousand. There were as many as eight thousand Chinese on the island as early as 1826, and they have since continued to maintain their majority, attracted, no doubt, by the opportunities offered for trade and all kinds of enterprises within the security of British law. The city now has a population of about three hundred and twenty-five thousand.

In Singapore one is impressed by the fact that a very large number of the men who look like leading citizens are Chinese. There are more handsome and high-class Chinese in evidence than anywhere else I know of except Peking. In Singapore they are seen riding about in fine motor-cars, attending to business in splendidly equipped offices ; running banks, factories, large shipping concerns, import and export houses, and every other kind of enterprise that would help to make up the sum of a city's commerce and trade. Moreover, they are the owners of a majority of the big rubber-plantations and tin-mines throughout British Malaya. They are represented on the colonial councils, have a large share in all municipal governments, and are regarded by the British as citizens of the highest

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value. They are altogether an interesting evidence of what the Chinese are capable of being under decent and honest government.

The British have made Singapore a fine and rather beautiful city. There are splendid government buildings, educational institutions, churches, business houses, clubs, and hotels ; the parks and open green spaces are many and magnificent ; the streets and tree-bordered drives are well metalled and well kept ; there are sea-walls and breakwaters and piers, and everything else, in fact, that is Occidental, and therefore an evidence of unsparing energy and far-sighted ambition.

The English colonials, and many of the Chinese also, live in handsome residences and picturesque bungalows set in large gardens which line broad avenues running in sweeping curves far out into the country, where they join perfect highways, over which one drives to see the hills—hills rolling into hills and stretching away for miles on miles to meet the wonderful blue arch of the sea ; hills planted in neatly set rows of rubber-trees which run down through the valleys and up over the crests, down into the valleys again, and still up and on as far as one's eye can reach, that being one of the most extraordinary sights on earth ! And one wonders what this part of the world would be like to-day if it had not been for pioneering, energetic, nonchalant, sporting, indifferent, high-minded, more or less altruistic and altogether wonderful little England !

When I returned to the ship the second afternoon they were just getting ready to take on what the captain called ‘queer cargo.’ It was lying alongside in a number of great flat barges and consisted of cranes and engines of immense size and extraordinary awkwardness. The native cargo-coolies did not know how to handle it, and, for that matter, neither did the captain. The coolies sat in rows on the barge rails and regarded it with woebegone

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expressions, while the captain leaned against the ship's rail and muttered maledictions.

'And I'm already a day late!' he said.

'Is that all?' I innocently inquired.

'Well, this is not the *Mauretania*.'

'No, I'd noticed that.'

'All right, chaff if you feel like it, but if I have to take that stuff on we'll be here a week. And then I've got to go off to a bally island and take on a cargo of oil.'

That was serious, and the fact that I only then learned about it goes to show how secret and well-guarded sailing directions are. By that time the only women passengers left aboard were my unimportant self and the always smartly garmented, languid, and careful-of-herself wife of an army officer who was bound for Bombay with a fixed intention of breaking through all the barbed red-tape entanglements that lay between her and her husband's station at Muskat.

'And where is the bally island?' I asked.

'Oh, off sou'east. It isn't even on our course.'

'How long will it take to get the oil aboard?'

'About twelve to fourteen hours.'

'Well, don't mind me. I knew when I came aboard that I was not starting on a pleasure trip. Are there any more delaying surprises?'

'There are. When we leave the oil island we go to Penang.'

'Oh, we do, do we? And at such a rate, when are we likely to get to Bombay?'

'About three weeks hence—if we're lucky.'

'Well, come on,' said I, 'let's get this cargo aboard. What are we standing round like this for?'

But it was no use. The question was where to put the unwieldy articles even after an apparatus had been rigged up to handle them. I offered to let him put one of the cranes in my cabin with the long end of it sticking out through the port-hole, but he only growled at me. Anyhow, the port-hole

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was probably not large enough. It was a very dinky ship as ships go. But I will say for it that before it started on the final perilous lap through the Mediterranean and on round to London it had a cargo aboard to the value of more than a million pounds sterling.

I could write a volume about the way we loaded up, but perhaps I had better not. We managed it, at any rate, and I assume a pronominal share in it because before we were through I was so interested that I felt as though I carried the whole tremendous responsibility on my own shoulders.

We finally weighed anchor and plodded off to the oil island. Our course lay through a close-set little archipelago which brought to mind all the dreams one ever dreamed about owning an island oneself. I should like to own an island. And I should want it to have long, shining white beaches, a mysterious-seeming mangrove swamp at one end, and fringes of tall, wind-bent palm-trees. But I think I should want it to rise up out of the sea for me somewhere in the vicinity of New York Harbour.

The oil island was a scar on the dream canvas, except that down on a long point to the westward there was a thick grove of cocoanut-palms with all the trees at the water's edge leaning toward the sunset. Otherwise it was a collection of unsightly tanks set in gashes cut in the hillsides.

We groaned our way up against an expensive and up-to-date-looking concrete dock, and they carried a four-inch hose through a hatch and attached it to a tank in our hold. Then they began to pump. The last thing I remember was a curious rhythmic sound—a combination of chug-chug and gurgle-gurgle—which went on far into the night. I know, because far into the night I wandered round the ship, trying to find a spot where the temperature felt like something less than one hundred and ten. I fell asleep in a deck chair as I was wondering what it would be like in my cabin.

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I think I shall have to pass Penang without comment. Though, come to think of it, I cannot. It was at Penang that I gave up ten dollars for a pagoda. It would be better to pass Colombo. At Colombo I got my only excitement out of an insect.

It is called the leaf-insect, and until it starts to crawl it is quite impossible to tell where the leaf leaves off and it begins. It comes in all sizes, from three inches long to the length of a little-finger nail. And it is not a leaf come to life, though that is what it looks like. It hatches out of tiny, square, brown eggs. What would be the leaf stem is its backbone, and the point where the leaf attaches to the twig is its head. Its legs look like bits of decayed and ragged leaf, and no two of them are identical in length, size, or shape. Its wings are irregular and veiny and have small discolorations on them, as though they had been touched by early frost. You could not tell the creature from the leaf it was sitting on to save your eyes. Most extraordinary thing I ever saw! It gave me the creeps and made me think of horror stories I have read about vampire orchids and boa-constrictor vines that yearn for human blood.

If I could have taken my eyes off the thing I might have seen more in Colombo, but we were there only long enough to take on a few barge-loads of tea, and the only other thing I did was to drive out to a hotel on a rocky point overlooking a storm-swept bay where hundreds of catamarans go fishing and scud home before the wind, with one huge brown sail on each bellying as though it would burst. You sit and watch them with a thrill in your blood as they fly before the darkening clouds and ride the high breakers to the long curving beach. And there they are pulled up under the bending cocoanut-palms, to be secured for the night. You sit and watch them and drink Ceylon tea, while, by way of variety of entertainment, dozens of head-nodding, soft-spoken crows crowd close about you to watch

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every mouthful of toast and cake that you eat and to beg for scraps like a lot of pet kittens.

‘Kaw-kaw?’ says one, very gently.

‘No, I want it myself,’ says you.

‘Kaw-kaw!’ not so gently.

‘Oh, very well! You may have a bit if you will take it out of my fingers. But, careful now!’

And as you bend down one of the others leaps like a flash to your table and grabs your cream-puff. At least it was my cream-puff that he got; then the black rascals gathered out on the lawn with it, looked at me out of the corners of their eyes, and laughed!

The knifelike catamarans with their great, square, brown sails and wide-curving outriggers scudded before the wind; storm-clouds rolled black across a rose-shot sunset sky; the tall, tortured palm-trees lining the long white beach lifted their heads before the wind gusts and bowed before the onrush of the foaming breakers—and the friendly crows tilted their heads at me and wondered what it could be in their familiar surroundings that made me look so enthralled.

After all, that was not much to see in Colombo, was it? But it took time, as a dream takes time. A swift hour, perhaps, and life’s gallery the richer for one more unforgettable picture. At any rate, when I come to it I shall be able to pass Colombo without comment.

But Penang. At Penang I gave up ten dollars *for a pagoda*. I could not very well give up less, because in the subscription-book the Buddhist handed me ten dollars was the smallest recorded contribution. There were many sums in three figures set opposite the names of Christians, but the ones, twos, and fives must have been rubbed out as fast as they were put in.

‘We are trying very hard,’ said the Chinese monk, ‘to turn the thoughts of our young men back to religion. The youths of the Buddhist faith

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have grown worldly beyond belief, and they almost never come to the temple to pray. So we intend to erect a magnificent pagoda, a thing of beauty and inspiration that they cannot escape. Whenever their eyes rest upon it their thoughts will turn in spite of themselves to the gods. It will be only through the gracious benevolence of our friends and visitors that we shall be able to do this.'

And that was where he passed me the book. I looked through it and saw all the big figures. There were pages of them, and I am sure he had collected thousands upon thousands of dollars. I hesitated a moment, but I finally said :

'Oh, well——' And as I put down the figure ten and made a dollar mark I murmured to myself, 'There goes a neutraliser for every mission-Sunday penny of my entire wasted Christian childhood !'

It was in the monks' refectory attached to one of the largest and finest Buddhist temples in the world. To see it I had climbed a mountain-side, up hundreds of moss-grown steps under the interlacing boughs of giant deodars. I had paused at the pool of the sacred turtles and had bought fresh, cool, green weeds at a little booth on its edge to feed the monstrous, slow-moving creatures. Then I had climbed more steps to come to the brink of the basin of the sacred carp. There I bought small sweet cakes and crumbled them on the scummy surface for the sake of seeing fins flash and fish tails whisked in the air. More steps and more—on up the templed mountain-side ; past rich, red, up-tilted roof-lines among the tree-tops ; through red-lacquered and tinsel-hung interiors sheltering great Buddhas asleep and great Buddhas awake and innumerable small Buddhas passing through the agonising stages of life unto life unto—nothingness !

And then the monk got me. A monk upon whom hung long, white, softly falling robes. He was a Chinese who spoke almost faultless English, who was handsome in an altogether Western sense,

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and who had the manners of a chamberlain of the Court of St. James's.

'It will be only through the gracious benevolence of our friends and visitors that we shall be able to do this,' he said.

To build a pagoda ! To turn the thoughts of Buddhist youth back to the gods ! And down in the town, as I was driving along toward the jetty, I passed a fine modern building which had chiselled in the stone above its wide entrance :

YOUNG MEN'S BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION

Flattery in its sincerest form !

Penang is an island on one side of a narrow strait, and a concession of about two hundred and eighty square miles on the other. It is the oldest British settlement in the Straits of Malacca, pre-dating Singapore by twenty-three years, and it was founded by Francis Light, father of William Light who founded Adelaide, Australia, and whose portrait hangs in the National Gallery in London. There is a reproduction of the portrait in a stupid big 'boost-book' I found in the ship's little library ; and a wild-eyed, rumple-haired man son William was ! His mother was Malayan.

Penang has a population of about twelve hundred Europeans—British, mostly—and more than one hundred and eighty thousand Asiatics, a very large percentage of the Asiatic population being Chinese. The Chinese are the rich men. They own practically all the great cocoanut plantations through which one must drive to reach any point on the island or on the mainland opposite, and, while England maintains law and order, it is they who export much of the tin, rubber, coffee, spices, tapioca, copra, sago, and other products which constitute the wealth of the Settlement.

It was between Penang and Colombo that Bar-

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retto first began to worry about my life-preserved. He came into my cabin one day and took it down out of its rack over my berth, and, carefully placing it where it would take up the most room and be most in the way, said, solemnly, ‘I think more better you keep close by now.’ And after that he would have followed me around with it if I had encouraged him.

Barretto was my cabin-steward. He was what is known in this part of the world as a ‘Goa boy.’ That is, he was a mixture of Indian and Portuguese and came from the little Portuguese colony of Goa, which supplies nearly all ship and hotel servants, for the reason that, being neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring—or, in other words, having no caste to lose—they are able to handle any kind of food or do any kind of work without polluting themselves. They are supposed to be Christians.

Barretto had adopted me after the manner of the ‘dog that adopted a man.’ He was for ever at my heels, offering lip solicitude and trying to square himself. This all came about through my having casually remarked to the chief steward that I wished the creature would condescend to sweep my cabin at least once a week, give me an occasional drop of water for face-washing purposes, and not act as though he expected me to wear out a bath-towel before I could get a fresh one. The chief must have had him ‘up on the mat,’ because he came into my cabin one day when I was busy writing and dropped on his knees before me. I was never more surprised in my life. He put his little brown hands together in a ‘now I lay me’ fashion and began an incoherent recital in which I caught such phrases as ‘Wife and chil’ren,’ ‘L’il’ son—so high,’ ‘One baby dead,’ ‘Earn l’il’ money,’ ‘Li’l boy—so high—O memsahib ! ’

‘Rise, little black-and-tan friend,’ said I, ‘and make your apologies on your two feet.’

He would not understand such English, of course;

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otherwise I should not have used it. But he saw that I did not laugh, and he must have thought my smile was one of benign sympathy. In any case, he adopted me, and after that he was always leaving brooms and dust-cloths around where I could see for myself that he had been using them. And bath-towels ! From Hong-Kong to Singapore I had only one ; from Singapore to Bombay I had a stack of them in my cabin all the time, and always ostentatiously displayed in some spot from which I had to hurl them in order to get at something else.

It was a danger zone into Colombo, but it was a far more dangerous zone into Bombay. Many mines had been swept up within a certain area round the port, so it was necessary that every ship should enter through a defined and carefully guarded channel.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning when we came up to the point indicated in our sailing directions as the foot of the lane of safety for us, and there we joined an interesting company of ships.

One of them was on fire—a big freighter down from the Persian Gulf. A ghastly sight she was ! Everything above her hull had been burned away except her funnels, and she was belching great clouds of smoke and occasional long licks of flame. Her crew and some passengers, I learned afterward, had taken to the life-boats and had been picked up by the big ocean-going tugs that had come in response to her wireless call. These tugs now had her in tow and the intention was to beach her, but she had a fearful list and looked as though she might capsize at any moment. Some of us stood by the deck rail and watched her intently for an hour or more, thinking we were going to see her sink. She looked as though she could hardly be worth beach room even on an empty beach.

Then there was a troopship from East Africa lying off our port bow, filled with happy men in khaki who crowded the rails and shouted across at

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us ; and a short distance away lay a big hospital ship from Mesopotamia. A half-dozen small cargo-carriers and a full oil-tanker, all low in the water, were up ahead, while beyond, a little way, another tanker, outward bound and evidently empty, was speeding along in defiance of mines and kicking her propellers in the air as though she were having the time of her young life. The hospital ship was painted in the white and red of the Cross of Mercy, the trooper was grotesquely camouflaged, and everything else was battle grey. The tropic sun was beating eye-searing sparks from a shimmering sea, and all round hovered a wonderful silence. The scene was a study in unbelievable colour.

Then down came the little black mine-sweepers. They were very efficient-looking and just a bit cocky about themselves.

‘Here, you chaps, stand about now, will you !’ they seemed to say. ‘Let the hospital ship go first. Look alive there, little tanker ! What d’ye think you are—royalty ? Move over to starboard and make way. That’s right ! Troops next ! And now you dilapidated old merchantman —this to us—“move along. No need to tell you to keep your speed down. You couldn’t make more than six knots to save your bloomin’ old hull ! Be off with you, all of you ! You’ve got a clear way up to the docks now, thanks to us as risks our lives for you ! If it wasn’t for us you’d all be down with Davy Jones !’

And the old merchantman, weighed down with cargo worth more than a million pounds sterling, puffed a humble response from her big bass horn and churned slowly away in the wake of the trooper —the old merchantman that would go on from Bombay, through Suez, across the Mediterranean, and round through the dangers of the Atlantic to London !

And it was just twenty-seven days since we left Hong-Kong !

CHAPTER III

THE BOMBAY SIDE OF THE PUNKA

It should have been cool in Bombay. It was not cool. I have set at the head of this chapter a phrase which is supposed to mean 'cool,' but it is a phrase which must have been invented by some one in a moment of derisive delirium induced by hot atmospheric pressure. It refers to the side of the punka opposite the ropes where the strongest and coolest breeze is to be enjoyed, but, so far as my experience goes, it suggests an absolutely false idea of the Bombay climate.

It is said that the cool season is due in Bombay along in October. And this may be true. But I can testify that it makes its way in very cautiously and that in its earliest efforts it likes best to catch the stranger unawares along about three o'clock in the morning. In daytime it may haunt a few shady corners, but it is wholly imperceptible in any spot the sun touches.

One's attention is sometimes called to curiously convincing evidence that the war has actually changed the climate in the hitherto temperate regions of the earth, but India is too far from the guns to get the benefit of any atmospheric disturbance they may create.

However, while the physical discomfort of the white man in the brown man's land is not diminished, he thinks less about it than he formerly did. Toil and worry and sustained serious-mindedness have taken the place of leisure and fascinating frivolity, and non-essentials have faded for most persons into the unregarded background of life.

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This is true in some degree all over India ; it is especially true in Bombay, which rose at the beginning of the war to pre-eminent importance as the chief base of the war zones of the East.

The port of Bombay is the front door of India. Following the long coast-line round the tremendous peninsula, one discovers no side doors of special consequence ; and Madras and Calcutta open upon Asia and the realms of the Pacific. That is why Bombay, destined to become the first city of India, developed into one of the busiest centres of activity on earth when India turned to face a European world at war and to throw her weight into the struggle for the Empire's existence.

On the way round from Colombo I reread some of Mark Twain's impressions of Bombay in *More Tramps Abroad*. A friend in Japan gave me this old treasure, with which I thought I was entirely familiar, and I had a delightful browse in its forever-green pages. It was a great mistake.

Mark Twain had what he himself called 'an unregulated imagination.' In an instant he saw Bombay as 'a bewitching place, a bewildering place, an enchanting place—the Arabian Nights come again !' And in an instant he saw all the colour and dash and heard all the wild sounds and the weird music of Oriental life which others must search for, and, having found, perhaps may never recognise. As a preliminary guide he serves principally to make one regret one's own sobriety of soul.

However, after we had crept for hours up through the buoyed channel with nothing at all to see except a dim, far-away coast-line, I did get a vision of Bombay. Not a view ; a vision. It had been a long, weary, slow-passing day. By that time it was late afternoon and a white mist that was lying on the sea floated up round the base of the city like a filmy veil. No buildings at all could be seen, but rising above the mist were many gilded domes,

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shining white minarets, and uneven red roof-lines, all bathed in the glow from a great flame-coloured sun that hung low in the west. It was rather wonderful and alluring.

Then we steamed up and dropped anchor in a harbour crowded with ships : hospital ships—I never saw so many hospital ships in one port!—battle-grey freighters and fighters ; camouflaged troopers ; tankers and tubs ; tugs, scows, barges, common rowboats, and many swift-scurrying launches. Whereupon the doctors and passport officials came aboard and the stewards began to pile the luggage on the decks preparatory to putting it ashore. The remainder of the day was taken up with the usual inspections of various kinds.

When we got up to the dock it was black dark and pouring rain, but, having been on the ship twenty-seven days, I was glad to go ashore under any circumstances. So I gathered my small belongings, gave a grand-looking Indian baggage-agent instructions with regard to the rest, passed through the customs-house, signed my declaration of nothing to declare, and made my way out through the puddles and the downpour to a rickety gharri.

‘A bewitching place, an enchanting place—the Arabian Nights come again’? No, nothing like that! That for peace-times, maybe, and for the fortunate few. For me miles of low, black freight-sheds peered at in the gloom over a dripping, leaking, clammy rain-apron ; for me splattering mud and slush and steaming, intolerable heat ; for me a rattle and rumble and jolt and the crack of a wicked whip over the flank of a plodding horse ; for me disillusion and vague depression and an eventual whirl up under the grand porte-cochère of a wildly ornate hotel, the outer offices of which were crowded with important-looking Indians in gorgeous raiment and marvellous turbans and Englishmen of the war services—the Englishmen all in uniform. It was difficult to get accommodation,

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but eventually they took me in ; and I found lights and laughter and gaiety and a feverish kind of rush that could not fail to lift one's spirits. I knew I was on the threshold at least of Mesopotamia !

Later I stood at a window of my room and looked down into a deep court. The rain was falling in gusts and flurries, washing the wonderful leaves of giant palms that swayed and rustled in the wind. I looked out across bands of light that were falling from a thousand windows and balconies ; I heard the far-away clatter of horses' feet and the honk of the horns of many motors ; I felt considerably like a stray cat in a strange wet alley, and I wanted to make lonesome-sounding stray-cat noises, but I thought to myself :

‘ Well, never mind to-day. To-morrow we shall see.’

And to-morrow brought a telegram which said Their Excellencies would be pleased to have me spend the week-end with them. Just that and nothing more. It was indefinite with the indefiniteness which assumes that one knows all that needs be known. And of course one should know certain kinds of things, but one doesn't always. And I didn't know in the least where Their Excellencies were to be found. The telegraphed invitation did not say. The telephone-book and Murray's Guide both had Government House located on Malabar Hill, Malabar Hill being the smart residential district of Bombay. But my physical discomfort assured me that no Excellencies worthy of being Excellencies would stay in Bombay in such weather. I thought perhaps my telegram of acceptance—which had to be addressed to a set of initials and sent out into space—would be answered by some aide-de-camp or other who would know that a perfect stranger should be told how and where to proceed. But, no, nothing like that.

If I did all my roaming ‘ mid pleasures and

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palaces' and Excellencies and governmental grandeurs my homing instinct might have guided me, but I don't mind acknowledging that I had to ask. I waited until Friday morning, and I was due some time Friday afternoon to present myself before Their Excellencies. It was time for me to do something about it, and to save myself the embarrassment of displaying my disgraceful ignorance to an Englishman I went to my own American consul, a fine, upstanding, clean-cut, business-like, and altogether satisfactory gentleman.

'I'm in trouble,' I began.

With a look of patient resignation he made a typically consular gesture which said as plainly as words : 'All Americans are when they are away from home. At least that's the only kind a consul ever meets !'

And I didn't clear up the atmosphere any too hastily, because I rather enjoyed it ; but after a not much more than merely appreciable pause I eased his mind by revealing the nature of my difficulties. After which I was a citizen in good standing.

'You go to Cook's or somewhere and get a ticket to Poona,' he said. 'Your train leaves at a quarter to three, and it gets you there about half-past seven. You can depend on Government House to do the rest.'

It was then half-past twelve, and it was a Mohammedian holiday.

I would emphasise the fact that when a Mohammedian or a Hindu takes a holiday he takes it. No half-holidays or anything like that for him. And all his holidays, that are really *holy days*, are sacred to him as no day was ever sacred to a Christian. The Mohammedans in Bombay have a monopoly of the chauffeur and gharri-driving businesses, and there was not a vehicle of any kind to be found within a radius of five miles. I had been compelled to walk to the consulate and I would jolly well have to walk back to the hotel—a matter of at least two

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miles. I had not yet had time to acquire a sun-helmet, though one is told at once that it is practically certain death to go out without one, and my sunshade was a blue-and-white-striped charmeuse frivoly that anybody could see was far more ornamental than useful. However, dying is a process one is never called upon to repeat. I walked. And, having nervous qualms about the difficulties I was going to encounter in getting something to take me and my belongings to the two-forty-five train, I walked fast.

In the meantime I had acquired a servant. When you are travelling in India you simply have to have a servant. Otherwise you go unserved. You do, anyhow.

My servant was a Mohammedan and an elderly kind of gentleman. You do not have women servants. Only about one and a half per cent. of the women of India—in a population of three hundred and twenty million plus—are literate in any degree, and the minds of the other ninety-eight and a half per cent., having become eyeless through æons of benightedness, are not worth much for anything, the universal testimony being that for general purposes the average Indian *ayah* is utterly useless.

My servant's name was Vilayat. An *Arabian Nights* kind of person he was, and I think he was named for one of the forty thieves. He was six feet three inches tall in his bare black feet, and he wore a tall white turban on top of the rest of his tallness. He had a grey beard and great dignity, and he proved to be an expert at getting other people to do his work for baksheesh, which he freely and grandly distributed from the expense allowance I gave him. Having procured my tickets on the way from the consulate, I handed them to him and said :

‘ We take the two-forty-five train to Poona.’

Whereupon I did my own packing, while he went off to make himself fit to associate with the govern-

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mentally employed. He returned in fine flowing raiment and a fresh turban marvellously wound just in time to boss the coolies I had called to carry my bags down to the motor-car I had myself, with infinite difficulty, secured. Incidentally, he solemnly explained that he had been compelled to go to a mosque and offer a special prayer in order to be cleansed of the sin of what he called 'working' on a holy day.

Just the same, everybody has to have one of him. Life would not be worth living without him—whatever may be said of life with him. He got forty-five rupees, or about fifteen dollars, a month. And all the Anglo-Indians—Anglo-Indians being people who really belong to India and are not just temporary residents—complain bitterly about the way servants' wages have gone up. And justly, too. One good English servant is equal to at least three Indians, and in order to get his work done at all the Englishman in India must have so many of them that in the end his bill for service often amounts to more than it would at home.

Five dollars a month used to be excellent wages for a bearer. Which reminds me that Vilayat was a 'bearer,' not a servant. I'm sure I don't know why. It is merely a local name and has no meaning at all, so far as I can discover. I never saw Vilayat bearing anything heavier than a parasol or a railway ticket, unless my presence in the offing might be counted as a burden. Though, come to think of it, all these servants apply for positions armed with packets of letters of excessive recommendation; many of them aged and frayed. And these letters invariably begin, 'The bearer,' So-and-so. That must be the way they came by their curious designation.

Poona lies south-east of Bombay about one hundred and twenty miles, and to get to it the railway crosses the great Bore Ghaut, a ghaut being a moun-

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tain pass or a range of mountains or a flight of steps leading down to a river where Hindus burn their dead and go for holy ablutions, and a number of other things, for all I know. It is a little confusing at first, but one learns to know the difference between a mountain range and a stairway, even though they are called by the same name.

When I am climbing a mountain into cool altitudes I always feel that I am going north. One goes 'up north' and 'down south,' and it is humanly instinctive to feel that everything in a southerly direction should be down-hill. An individual mental quirk, I suppose. The climb down south up to Poona is a steep and winding climb for which they have to use powerful engines that puff and struggle and have brakes that grind and groan. There are twenty-six tunnels and eight dizzy viaducts in the course of sixteen miles over the Bore Ghaut, and during the rains one can count as many as fifty waterfalls pouring out of the gaunt black rock of the almost perpendicular hills. A specially magnificent one, up at the head of a vast panoramic valley, has a sheer drop of more than three hundred feet.

In the immediate vicinity of this there are a number of gigantic pipe-lines winding down the mountain-side, and long converging lines of tall steel towers carrying wire up over the far-away crests and off into a world beyond. One wants to know the why and the wherefore of these, and one learns that they are the harness of the waterfalls. An enterprising company has built a great reservoir ; the water is stored in the heights, and when the rains are over and the falls dry up it is let down as it is required, and the year round enough power is generated to light Bombay, run its electric railways, and turn every wheel in the whole presidency, if need be.

It is rather a wonderful little journey to Poona, as journeys go. At Bombay station Vilayat had

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watched me secure for myself a seat in a first-class compartment, had directed his coolie where to put my dressing-bag, and had then betaken himself to some other part of the train. And that was the last I saw of him.

There was an English army officer sitting opposite me, and I finally succeeded in making him realise that he might talk to me without outraging any very sacred conventions. He was quite conservative about it at first and I missed no scenery on his account, but when he once got going he was as entertaining as need be. He had been badly wounded in Mesopotamia, had spent several weeks in hospital at Bombay, and had just returned from a month's leave, which he spent in Kashmir on a mountain lake 'in a house-boat moored in the wide-branched shade of a drooping chenar-tree.' Cannot say that I was all wrought up with pity for him.

When we stopped at Kirkee he was telling me all about how he hunted big game in the Kashmir mountains in the daytime and carved wood treasures in the bazaars of the towns in the evenings.

Kirkee is three and a half miles from Poona and about a mile and a half from Government House, which is called Ganeshkhind. And Kirkee is the station for Ganeshkhind. I did not know that. How should I? You address mail and telegrams to 'Government House, Poona.' That was what the upstanding, clean-cut, business-like, and altogether satisfactory American consul told me. But he did not tell me that when you are a visitor you get off at Kirkee and go from there to Ganeshkhind.

I was busy listening to my army officer and wishing I owned some of his carved-wood treasures. In fact, it all sounded so wonderful that I was just about making up my mind to forget Baghdad and to go on up to Kashmir. Then I happened to glance out of the window.

It was about half-past seven o'clock, dark as midnight, and the usual evening rain of the rainy

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season was coming down in torrents. In the gleam of the station lights I saw a white uniform with red trimmings and a sort of red flannel breastplate effect fastened on with brass buttons. It was unmistakable.

'Isn't that a Government House uniform?' I asked.

The officer peered out into the gloom and answered, 'Yes, that's a Government House chauffeur.'

I had not told him where I was going, else he probably would have told me where to get off. And just then a worried-looking young man came rushing along the platform looking in at the windows. He had lost something. That something was myself. I knew him at once for a secretary. Though he was not. He was an aide-de-camp out of uniform. But aides and secretaries are usually of the same breed of attractive and irresponsible youth. It was he who had not troubled to tell me where to go and how to get there. I was glad he had lost me. He caught my eye.

'Are you for Government House?' he shouted.

With a variety of gesticulation I said, Yes, I was. The train had begun to move, and was gaining speed every instant, so he paid no further attention to me. He just gathered himself into an energetic little knot and yelled: 'Ya-a-r! Ya-r-r! Stop! Stop!' And they threw on the brakes.

Somebody dug Vilayat out, and he emerged from somewhere with my blue-and-white-striped charmeuse parasol, but my week-end trunk with all the essentials in it was in the goods-van—otherwise the baggage-coach ahead. They had not troubled to back the train up to the station, and the goods-van was just where a lot of roaring little rivulets were sweeping down the track-sides. The trunk simply had to go on to Poona, because by that time the conductor was visibly annoyed and the passengers were all gathering on the platforms or thrusting

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their heads out of windows into the rain and asking sarcastic questions.

Vilayat was ordered to go on to Poona with the trunk, and one of the motor cars was sent after him to fetch him and it back to Ganeshkhind with all haste. It was then nearly eight o'clock, and at eight-thirty there was to be a grand dinner-party with forty guests. This is as good a place as any, I suppose, to say that I knew absolutely nothing about Indian Government House procedures. Let nobody imagine that they are like any other procedures anywhere else on earth.

All this time, standing under umbrellas in the rain—with lips set, no doubt, in patient resignation—were a colonel and his lady ; an archdeacon, no less ! and a couple of other guests. We all had to crowd into one automobile, the other one having gone to Poona for my trunk, and I think they were displeased with me. I really think they were. But as soon as I told them I was a stray cat in a strange alley and all about how I had to go to the American consul to find out where the Governor of the great Bombay Presidency lived, they began to feel better about it. They were very nice, as a matter of fact, and when we whirled up under the porte-cochère of Government House we were all laughing so much like ordinary humans that the three aides who came out to meet us, in gold rope, yellow lapels, and clicking spurs, had to assume a little extra dignity in order to bring us down to the level of decorum requisite to the environment.

And I don't mind saying I was just a little awestricken. I had never seen anything quite like it before. I have met here and there, in my meanderings round the earth, a few notable occupants of notable palaces. But everything in India is different. I learned that at once. And I learned why, too. I shall come to that presently.

There were two very tall Indians standing beside the steps which led up under the porte-cochère to

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the entrance. They were all dressed up in red, with splendid high turbans, and very gracefully and statelily they held ten-foot lances with gilded axes crossing spears at their tips.

My thoughts flew back to the years I once upon a time spent in Manila, and I made a few swift, entertaining comparisons. The Philippines have about ten million inhabitants, and the Governor-Generalship of the Philippines is the biggest executive job that the American President has to offer any man.

Malacañan Palace, where the Governor-General lives in Manila, is a rather beautiful and dignified old Spanish residence, and the gardens round about have been made very fine by a succession of American governors. But as for pageant and parade and the 'pomp of power,' there has never been anything like that under American so-called sovereignty. Instead of gorgeously uniformed sentinels guarding the grand entrance, there is an Irish policeman.

'And pwhat are ye afther wantin' now ? ' says he.

'Is the Governor in ? ' says you.

And you never by any chance say 'His Excellency.' You might very decidedly approve of ceremoniousness yourself, but you would know better than to try it on an Irish policeman.

'Well, shure, he may be, an' ag'in he may not be,' says he. 'It all depinds. Have ye got an engagement with 'im now ? '

You have, of course. Even an American would hardly have the temerity to walk in on a governor without letting him know. Though, come to think of it, I believe they have been known to do so. And I don't know about Malacañan Palace now, either. The Irish policeman was of the old Taft and Rooseveltian days. It was democracy carried to its logical conclusion, but I am not sure that many persons were entirely satisfied with it.

Our Jacksonian simplicity is probably all a mis-

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take anyhow, and especially in our outlands. The brown peoples love show and regard it as an evidence of strength. They respect a combination of bright red and shining brass, while the clank of panoply and the clink of ornamentation are music to their ears. And, for that matter, white peoples are not wholly immune to the influence of ostentation and magnificence. The tall red-and-brass-clad Indians with the long lances certainly impressed me. They made me feel as though I ought to be trailing priceless brocades up the imposing steps, carelessly dropping pearls on the way.

One of these days I intend to write a detailed account of a number of things, but just now I must hurry on because this really is not a visit to India. It is the splendid ceremony of Indian official life that I wish to emphasise. The Viceroy and the governors of presidencies and provinces are the direct representatives of the King-Emperor, and it is definitely a part of their official business to maintain the dignity of Empire as it is represented in courtly ceremony and show. It is not every man and woman, however highly they may have been born and however used they may always have been to the scenic effects of court life, who can make a success of it in a colonial environment. England trains a majority of her colonial administrators in colonial administration, and once they get into it and make a success of it it is a life sentence.

My things turned up in the nick of time, and I was able to descend to the grand drawing-room in a leisurely manner. I was glad of that, because if there is anything I do not approve of it is descending to a drawing-room in an unlesisurely manner.

I found when I entered that a majority of the other thirty-seven guests had already assembled, and the first person my eyes fell upon was a tall, stately lady in white satin with a rope of pearls and a tiara. This was rather disconcerting and made me conscious of the wrinkles in my gold-brocaded

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chiffon over champagne colour. Gold-brocaded chiffon over champagne colour sounds rather nice as a description, but there are things which no description can possibly describe, and that gown is among them. I suppose one would hardly be expected to travel round with one's tiara—especially in war-time—but one might have had along one's new cloth of silver with silver lace and blue net draperies, if it had not been for the stupidity of a ship's baggage-master. I forgot to say that my innovation-and-too-big-for-any-cabin trunk which contained all my best garments was put off the ship by mistake at Singapore, and that I might not get it for a month—if ever!

But to me this tragedy was a mere detail. I did not know that I was about to encounter a case of if-you-have-clothes-prepare-to-wear-them-now. I was used to war-time simplicity, and had come happily to a point in my spiritual development where packing for a week-end was the least of my worries, whether I had anything special to pack or not. However, the tiara lady had fewer companions in her haughtiness than I had in my humbleness, so I managed not to mind.

The numerous aides went through some adroit social manœuvres which resulted in the precise but careless-like circular line-up of the guests round the room, then the band in the *patio*—I do not know what else to call a great flag-paved and beautifully furnished, half-indoors and half-outdoors space—began to play, and Their Excellencies entered.

At which point I intend to stop being frivolous. I am not meaning to be disrespectful in any case. I was surprised, that was all; and so much so that I took one of my dinner partners into my confidence and told him so, saying that it was the first time since the war began that I had seen anything so completely normal in the way of social form and formalities. It was the first time in three years,

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for instance, that I had seen a company of women wearing white gloves, and I had spent a good deal of time in London, in Paris, and in Rome.

'But this is India,' said he. 'We wanted to stop all the seeming extravagances here too, but if we should let down an inch or give up a single item of our usual processes, it would be taken at once by the Indians as a sign of weakness.'

And that was the explanation. India is proud of the strength of Great Britain. India loves the vast confederation of power represented by the King-Emperor. It has been characteristic of the Indian peoples throughout their history to desert a banner that begins to trail, and England's banner as it is borne aloft in India to-day is the only sign by which the teeming millions are capable of gauging the might of England. It is necessary to maintain the immediate and outer semblances of normality.

I was to learn next morning whence came all the flowers. There are broad acres, hundreds of them, within the domain of Ganeshkhind, and the park surrounding the house, with its stretches of velvety lawn, its banks of shrubbery, its ancient trees, its winding, shady walks, its lakes and lily-ponds, and its unlimited flower gardens, is riotously beautiful.

The long table was ablaze with yellow cosmos under very high candles, the rays from which shot upward into the ten thousand reflecting facets of a row of magnificent old crystal chandeliers. It was a beautiful scene, and could have made one forget the war for a moment had it not been that every man at the table except His Excellency was in uniform.

And it was a noble room. With a great fireplace at one end, its vast wall spaces were panelled from floor to beamed ceiling in splendid oak. Within the panels hung portraits of British sovereigns.

Her Excellency sat facing the Queen on one side, while His Excellency faced the King on the other.

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Not that it makes much difference, perhaps, but I faced King William—which shows how far removed I was from the seat on His Excellency's right. I was separated from that honour by the beneficent reigns of both Queen Victoria and King Edward, to say nothing of Queen Victoria as a girl.

I had an army officer on either side of me, and the one of lesser rank, at least, gave an excellent imitation of a man who knows how to knit up the threads of conversation even though their other ends were held by a perfect stranger, and she an impossible American. He of the higher rank and greater rotundity had a mistaken idea which he spent some time during dinner in misadroitly exposing. This idea was that to make himself popular with me all he had to do was to talk about how long it took the United States to get into the war. Some Englishmen are like that. But not many, Heaven be thanked !

At a certain point at any formal party in India the host rises to his feet ; his guests do likewise ; they raise their glasses and he says, very quietly, ‘The King-Emperor !’ Then if there is a band everybody stands perfectly still through the first three lines of ‘God Save the King.’

Americans used to loll around under the glorious strains of ‘The Star-Spangled Banner.’ Then came a time when the national consciousness began to stir and most of us got so we were able to struggle to our feet—along about ‘the twilight’s last gleaming.’ After which a quickening of the national heart under a threat of national danger and a sudden realisation that the cue upon which promptly to assume an attitude of reverence is, ‘Oh, say !’

And that is where we now all stand up. But to know what your national anthem really means you must hear its strains in an alien land over which your flag flies as an emblem of authority. Your flag stands for the liberties which it confers and for the power by which it maintains them, and

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if you have seen an unregenerate and chaotic people rising to regeneracy and order under its clean and masterful might, you get a new and a different feeling for it.

When we rose to ‘The King-Emperor’ at that table, I noticed in particular the long line of gorgeously attired Indian house-service men who stood rigidly at attention behind the guests they had served, and my mind flashed beyond them and out across the boundless expanse of India with her three hundred and twenty-plus millions of people for whom the British flag is a symbol of such security and internal peace as they never knew under any other, and it was reverently that I echoed His Excellency’s toast :

‘The King-Emperor ! ’

CHAPTER IV

AN INTERESTING BUT ANXIOUS INTERVAL

IN the meantime it must not be forgotten that I am on my way to Baghdad !

It was in the drawing-room after dinner the first evening at Ganeshkhind that His Excellency said to me :

‘ Well, now that we have you here, what specially may we have the pleasure of doing for you ? ’

‘ I want to go to Baghdad ! ’ I announced—just like that. And I confess that such a desire impressed even me as being slightly unreasonable. Lord Willingdon laughed in a way that should have discouraged me utterly, and assured me that he knew few persons in India who did not want to go to Baghdad.

‘ But it is impossible ! ’ he said. ‘ General Maude never would consent to it, and without his consent nobody can get into Mesopotamia at all. And a lady ! Oh no ! He wouldn’t have a lady within a thousand miles of Baghdad if he could help it.’

‘ But I ’m not a lady,’ I said. He looked a bit startled for an instant, but he soon got what to the average working woman is an old-time joke, and he seemed to like it.

‘ We might ask him,’ I suggested.

And it may be that was the least His Excellency could have done, but I came in time to realise that it was a very great deal. He was one of General Maude’s very close friends, but the etiquette of the situation demanded that he convey my request through the Viceroy and the chief of the General

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Staff at Simla. I began at once to feel very small and insignificant, and I had an uncomfortable impression that to make such a request through such a channel entitled me to social ostracism.

However, the request was made, and I sat down to await the issue.

No, I did not sit down. I explored Bombay.

The British did not take Bombay away from its original owners—whatever they may have been. The Portuguese did that a whole century before the little island colony came to the crown of Britain, and it came to the crown of Britain as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza when she married Charles II. That is the picturesque small item of history which gives Bombay a unique place in the British Empire. Just a little group of practically uninhabited islands lying close in against the mainland of India, they were transferred to England the same year New York became an incorporated city—in 1665.

Just a little group of islands lying close in against the mainland of India, they were separated by shallow channels which have since been filled in or spanned by gigantic causeways, so that now the island of Bombay, twenty-two and a half square miles in area, looks as though God and not enterprising Englishmen had made it.

Why the Portuguese should have so greatly under-estimated the value of the place would be difficult to figure out. Those things interest me, and I want to drag the ancient mistaken ones back and say to them, ‘Well, here now, don’t you see?’ —thus and so. But the Portuguese seem always to have been bad judges of ports. And always they have given things up, not reluctantly and with duly filed protests, but with a kind of confident assurance that they were getting the better of the bargain. In the early nineteenth century they clung jealously to the shallow and useless harbour of

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Macao on the Pacific coast of Asia, while they permitted the British to acquire the inestimably valuable near-by island of Hong-Kong, along with the wide and deep waterways surrounding it. And in the seventeenth century they preferred the unimportant port of Goa south of Bombay on the mainland coast—which they still possess—to the advantages of the finest harbour in the East, which the British instantly recognised.

At least the British traders did. In those days the British traders—sailing the seas in their picture ships of untold and untellable romance—were out for themselves. They were neither altruistic nor imperialistic. They thought little of benefiting the peoples of the rich Eastern lands into which they thrust themselves, and as little of aggrandisement for the throne of their sovereign. It was an age of adventure and gain, and adventure and gain were the twin fascinations the old traders pursued, along with their contemporaries of nearly every nationality.

King Charles II. on his throne, waging his unintelligent battle for ‘divine right’ against the then well-developed spirit of democracy among his Anglo-Saxon people—what could he know about the values of the great outer world then breathing its first breath of unbelievable life? Four years after the islands of Bombay came to him in the dowry of Catherine of Braganza he transferred them to the East India Company *for an annual rental of fifty dollars!* And not so very long before that the Indians sold the island of Manhattan for something plus a string of beads!

Bombay now has nearly one million inhabitants. At the beginning of the nineteenth century it already had two hundred thousand, and early in the twentieth century the census-takers counted 959,537 souls. Nearly seven hundred thousand of these are Hindus, and one hundred and fifty thousand are Mohammedans, while less than six-

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teen thousand, counting both mixed and pure European blood, are Christians.

There are about sixty thousand Parsees, and the Parsees are perhaps the most interesting and important element in the community. It is to British initiative and example and to Parsee appreciation, intelligence, and generosity that Bombay owes the fact of her present existence as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Though I do not mean to imply that there have not been many generous, intelligent, and appreciative Hindu and Mohammedan citizens. It is just that the Parsees have been peculiarly conspicuous for these characteristics.

Yet they still maintain the unthinkable Towers of Silence in the heart and centre of Bombay's most fashionable residential district ; the Towers of Silence, where the Parsee dead are disposed of by the for ever hovering, horrible flocks of vultures that, on occasion, grow gorged and careless and drop human flesh and little bones in the flowering, fragrant gardens of the great on Malabar Hill. But what would you ? The Towers of Silence are unthinkable only to the Christian mind. To the mind of the Parsee all other methods of disposing of his dead are unthinkable.

The Parsees are Zoroastrians—worshippers of the sun and fire as the truest manifestations of the Almighty—and they came down from Persia into India about the middle of the seventh century when they began to be grossly persecuted by the Mohammedan conquerors of the Sassanide Empire. And they were persecuted always by the Mohammedan conquerors of India and by the Hindus, until the happy day arrived for all religions when British power began to be predominant in India. But Bombay was purely British long before the rest of India was anything but a happy hunting-ground for English merchants, and the Parsees—along with other mistreated elements in the population—

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flocked to the sure shelter of the British flag. There are only about one hundred and one thousand Parsees in all India to-day, and ninety thousand of them belong to the Bombay Presidency, while at least sixty thousand of them live in the city of Bombay.

Many of them are gentlemen of the finest type, and they are distinguishable by their long black coats and the curious, stiff, black, mitre-like hats they wear. Their homes are among the most pretentious in the city, and they control a tremendous percentage of its commerce and trade.

But they are remarkable principally for their unusual generosity.

The old-time Britishers in the East India Company set the example of civic ambition by building the great Town Hall, and since then millions of pounds sterling have been spent by public-spirited citizens for the erection of all kinds of fine buildings and institutions such as most municipalities have to worry along without unless they can be municipally provided.

One of the most interesting things about Bombay is the fact that it cannot be governed. It has to be coaxed and cajoled and at times benevolently deceived. It can be governed in so far as control by the police and the courts over individual action is concerned, but government may not arbitrarily undertake anything in the way of development and improvement without precipitating a variety of riots.

There is a great, teeming, native city lying round the beautiful modern quarter—with its parks and playgrounds, its deep-shaded avenues, its magnificent asphalted, palace-lined drives, its clubs and its churches, and its uproariously ornamental public buildings—and in this native city there are large bodies of representatives of each one of India's numerous clashing religions. And one might mention first the admirable Parsees.

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Does a pitiful small minority of squeamish Englishmen desire the removal of the fearful Towers of Silence to some point outside the heart and centre of its domestic life and social activities ? To be sure it does. But a united community of Parsees stands ready to tell the squeamish Englishmen to move themselves if they are not satisfied. The park within which these stand is forbidden ground. The idea of British oppression and despotism in India is a curious kind of joke.

Does it seem to the best interest of all concerned that a series of wide streets should be cut through the native city and that large modern tenement and apartment houses should be built to relieve congestion and to improve deplorable sanitary conditions ? Yes, but in carrying out such projects certain time-honoured citizens' rights might have to be invaded. In cutting a street, for instance, a Mohammedan mosque might be threatened, and if Government wants more trouble on its hands than it can conveniently manage, all it has to do is to invade by so much as an inch the sacred premises of a Mohammedan mosque.

Then there are the Jains and various castes of the Hindu faith whose prejudices are deep-rooted and far more important in their view than life itself. And these people are dirty. Their city reeks with filth even to-day, though a battle royal has been waged for years against their habits and customs. For example, since 1896 plague has been constantly prevalent in Bombay, and it breaks out every once in so often in epidemic form. The port has been quarantined time and again and commerce has suffered inestimable loss, while hundreds of thousands of lives have been sacrificed. Bombay would doubtless lead the whole East to-day in population if it had not been for epidemic plague.

The leading men of the community decided a few years ago that something would have to be done to ameliorate impossible conditions. So the Bom-

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bay City Improvement Trust came into being, an organisation entrusted principally with the complicated and nearly impossible business of getting the property owners and the population in general to listen to reason. It has in its membership eminent and respected representatives of every community and every sect in the city, who serve without pay, and who, for a good many years, have been going on with the job as diligently and faithfully as though they were making large private fortunes out of it. Behind them a Public Works Department and a body of their own builders and engineers stand ready to drive a wedge of actual performance into every breach they make in the compact prejudices of the people. And if that is not a curious way for a Government to get along with the governed, there is nothing curious in this world.

But it succeeds by degrees. And it happens that within the past five years splendid avenues actually have been cut through the native city—not straight, because wherever a Mohammedan mosque lay in the way a detour had to be made; streets have been widened; the drainage system has been tremendously improved; congested areas have been thinned out; fine tenement houses have been built here and there, and such projects undertaken and carried to completion as could not have been suggested a few years ago.

There is a Port Trust also, and it, too, is a trust in the sense that it is a guardian of public interests. It is an older institution than the City Improvement Trust and has more to show for its activities. It has so much, in fact, that I shall not attempt to write about it. Its members are able to deluge any visitor who will hold still long enough with a flood of statistical narrative that will sweep him off his feet. They like to ‘point with pride,’ and will defy you to name any city on earth that has finer docks, more magnificent warehouses, a better system of railway communication with the shipping

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services, or that has reclaimed from the sea greater areas of land.

Oh, all right, you say. You give up. Bombay is in many ways altogether amazing, has more civic pride to the square inch than any place you know anything about, and will be a wonderful city when it is finished. But ambition always keeps a few laps ahead of performance, and the war caught Bombay looking like anything but a finished product.

And, as I have said, the port is the front door of India. It was without a day's warning really that that door was thrown open to the greatest influx and egress of materials and men that the country had ever known. But the result was that everything went ahead and got itself completed and in operation in about half the time that ordinarily would be considered reasonable.

In India's terrific population there were before the war only about one hundred and twenty-five thousand Britishers all told, and of these more than three-fifths were soldiers. There were some eighty thousand English troops and one hundred and fifty thousand native troops in the regular Indian army. The native reserve forces amounted to only thirty-six thousand men ; there were eighteen thousand Imperial Service troops furnished by the princes of the native states, and, in addition, there was a home-guard, trained by regular officers, of thirty-six thousand European and Anglo-Indian volunteers.

This was the sum total of the Indian military establishment which kept India's millions quiescent under the 'galling yoke' of England, and I am told that when war was declared the whole force precipitated itself upon the unready city of Bombay with an evident intention of getting out and into the thick of the fray without an instant's delay.

An exaggeration, of course. But that was the way it seemed to the city's suddenly harassed inhabitants. And it means that Bombay was invaded almost overnight by an unprecedented crowd

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of army officers engaged on the never-before-under-taken-on-such-a-scale task of mobilisation and preparation for transport, while more troops than the city had ever seen were moved in from cantonments all over India in anticipation of immediate embarkation.

Everything everywhere was more or less muddled in those days, and there must have been fearful confusion in India. But Bombay could have been nothing but thrillingly interesting. In private letters and journals of the time I get a constantly recurring note of furious impatience with the men in command, and it is not difficult to imagine the heatedness and the excitement of luncheon- and dinner-table conversations.

Nobody knew where he was going, but everybody wanted to go to France—Indians and Englishmen alike. Then rumours began to float around that a force was to be sent to the Persian Gulf!

To the Persian Gulf? In the name of all that was unreasonable—*why?* What good would a force do off on a side-track like that when every available man was needed to check the German advance in the west!

Men who ought to have known better railed openly at the authorities for not being able to realise that India was not, as they expressed it, at that moment the Hub of the Universe. What danger could India be in from the north? None whatever! And whatever England required of Turkey or Persia could be obtained by peaceful negotiation after Germany was destroyed. And Germany probably would be destroyed, lock, stock, and barrel, within three or four months!

What a delusion! And how convincingly it proves the innocent ignorance on the part of Englishmen with regard to Germany's power and intention! Little we dreamed in those days of what was ahead of us! And little those men knew what a long, bitter struggle they were to have to preserve

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India and the Empire from the danger they were not able then to recognise !

One day, along about mid-October, 1914, a great fleet sailed out of Bombay Harbour. It was the largest of its kind that anybody up to that time had ever seen. It consisted of forty-six transports and three battle-ships—or gunboats of sorts—and it carried India's first contribution to the war.

Forty-two of the forty-six troopers carried two separate forces ; one consisting of cavalry, royal artillery, and infantry for France, and the other infantry, artillery, and Imperial Service troops for East Africa. The other four, escorted by one gun-boat, were bound for the Persian Gulf—carrying the vanguard of the army that has held the Mesopotamian zone.

An officer who was in command of one of the Indian regiments bound for the Persian Gulf—himself in a fit of depression at the time because he could not go to France—has sketched for me the scene of the sailing of this armada in colourful reminiscence. H.M.S. *Swiftsure*, a unit in the convoy, ran up a signal for all transports to be ready to heave anchor, and, in quiet, impressive obedience, each division moved slowly out to position in the grand fleet. The formation was completed just beyond the wide, beautiful outer harbour, and it was in the orange light of a tropical sunset that the ships steamed majestically away. They were to part company when night had fallen, to go their separate mysterious directions.

One can imagine that Bombay, after weeks of the excitement and rush of preparation, waked up next morning with the feeling which has grown familiar to so many persons in the world—the feeling of being very much left behind.

But there was work to do. England and Turkey were not yet at war ; there was no Gallipoli and no Mesopotamia ; but there were the German troops

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in East Africa on the borders of British East Africa to be accounted for, and Bombay would have to be both the base of supplies and the port for casualties in connection with operations in that direction.

And since England and Turkey declared war within two weeks it was not long before Bombay became the pivotal point of the widest-flung war area of them all. Instantly, unanimously, and with the strong support of the central Government, the British in India determined to discharge without assistance every obligation that could be imposed by the necessities of this area. And the actual performance has exceeded everybody's original conception of the possibilities.

As I am confining myself to a consideration of Bombay as a great British city and centre of war activity in India, I shall have to expose myself to a charge of partiality and of neglect of the fine work done and the sacrifices made in other cities and provinces of the Empire. But I think no reasonable person would expect any one to cover such a subject in less than several volumes.

Through the port of Bombay the armies in Mesopotamia and East Africa had to be provided with food, equipment, munitions, and all the paraphernalia of war, to say nothing of reinforcements mobilised in India or coming from various directions for transhipment at Bombay. But the first thing the city had to face was the necessity for making provision for the wounded and for meeting demands for different kinds of relief. They were fairly well off for peace-time hospitals—thanks to the generosity of public-spirited men—but a few hundred casualties would have taxed their capacity, and before the war organisers had time to finish their preliminary discussions they began to get appeals for help from Mesopotamia, from Gallipoli, and even from Europe.

I cannot imagine how it was accomplished, but

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the city now has five or six of the finest military hospitals in the world, with a capacity of something like ten thousand beds. In addition to which, when Alexandria and Cairo were being swamped by the fearful backwash from Gallipoli, a full hospital unit with complete equipment was organised and sent to Egypt.

There is a Bombay Presidency War and Relief Fund which undertakes anything from establishing hospitals to boosting great popular loans, and the Women's Branch is—the Women's Branch. To the casual onlooker and stranger in the land it looks very much like the tail that wags the dog. Which means that a great part of every kind of war work seems to be done by the women.

The Women's Branch was organised by Lady Willingdon, and Lady Willingdon is a business woman. She went all over the great Presidency, which has something like twenty million inhabitants, and organised the whole population of women, Indians and English together. Then she instituted a system of not too friendly rivalry between communities, which has resulted in a perfect deluge of successful output.

The organisation has made good with a minimum of friction, overlapping, and delay, and this has been due not so much to unusual devotion, perhaps, as to the fact that everything has been done on a business basis. I wonder if any one will ever compile statistics with regard to the number of pyjamas, bandages, bed jackets, fracture pillows, lounging-robés, slippers, underwear, sweaters, socks, and various other necessities that have been turned out by the women of the world in volunteer service during the past four years. And will any one ever try to estimate the value of this work ? It is beyond calculation.

The Women's Branch also accumulates and distributes both in Mesopotamia and East Africa all kinds of toilet articles and small things of convenience and comfort that soldiers like and need

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and that are not included in their regular equipment. And there is a department devoted to the accumulation and distribution of periodicals and libraries. Altogether a most admirable institution.

Another thing which has been undertaken with great earnestness and with promise of justifying success is the training of disabled Indian soldiers in profitable trades. The pension of the disabled soldier is very liberal considering the average earning capacity of the average Indian, so he is fairly well off to begin with. But it is the idleness of the incapacitated man that is to be dreaded more than the possibility of his ever being in actual need. So the Queen Mary's Technical School for Indian Soldiers was established, and now has enrolled a large and very interesting company of men ; men who are blind, armless, legless, and maimed in every imaginable way, and who are learning to do things that will keep them employed if they wish, and add considerably to their resources.

Some are learning to operate looms of one kind or another ; some make artificial flowers ; some raise chickens ; some who have both arms but are legless, go in for work on different kinds of electrical apparatus ; and a large number are learning to use hose-knitting machines. It is only within recent years that millions of Indians have begun to wear socks, but they wear them now—with garments which bear no resemblance to trousers, and which do not cover their calf-clasping garters—and the business of knitting socks can be very profitable. Each disabled soldier who cares to go in for knitting socks is given a machine which becomes his personal property.

Eventually I began to fear that I was quite right when I assured myself that it was not even remotely possible that I would be permitted to go to Baghdad. Why should General Maude make of me a conspicuous exception to his unalterable rule ? During

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the first two weeks of waiting I had an unwavering faith that eventually he would, but I was practically alone in my optimism.

Then the third week began to drag along, and not a word of any kind had come out of Mesopotamia. Many of my new-found friends began to look pleased, and to give expression to their sympathies with a confident finality of tone which drove me to looking up routes to Kashmir. Also I had an official invitation to visit the capital of the Mahara-jah of Mysore, and that sounded almost sufficiently alluring to relieve in some degree my pangs of disappointment. Had it not been for the old adage about no news being good news, I should have given up hope long before I did.

Though I did have one friend who shared my faith to some extent. Brigadier-General Stukely St. John, the port commandant, was convinced that there was no reason on earth why I should not be permitted to go, and that, therefore—— I regarded him as a most unusually intelligent and broad-minded man.

He gave me the freedom of his wonderful docks, and I spent many profitable hours in the midst of the interesting operations which he directs. I saw troops off to Mesopotamia and troops returning ; I watched on several occasions the orderly and noiseless disembarkation of ship-loads of sick and wounded men ; I went through acres of freight-sheds packed to capacity with materials of war and examined innumerable card indexes and files of various kinds in an endeavour to learn something about the scope of the supply and transport end of the business of war. And everything I learned served to strengthen my desire to follow the lines on up to the far-away battle-front.

One morning I went down early to have breakfast with the General and a fine old Australian skipper, who was taking on a load of cavalry horses. They thought I would appreciate an opportunity to

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observe the bewildering variety of dispositions that horses display on such an occasion. I did. And I had a most interesting forenoon. But just before I left the ship the skipper showed me a nice big empty cabin, and said what a pity it was I had not got permission to go to Mesopotamia. Otherwise I might have occupied that cabin up the Persian Gulf. As a matter of fact, the commandant had been reserving cabins for me quite regularly.

On the twenty-second day of waiting my faith deserted me, and I began at once to make rather precise arrangements to do something else—the while I struggled with an effort to dismiss from my mind Mesopotamia and all its works.

I went into the big hotel dining-room for luncheon, and the first person I saw was General St. John. I was passing his table with a casual greeting when he rose to his feet, thrust his hand into a pocket of his tunic, and drew out a folded paper. He handed it to me with a kind of ‘we win’ smile and the superfluous comment :

‘I think this may interest you.’

It did. At the moment the only thing in it that I was able to grasp was the word ‘permission.’ It was a decoded message—marked ‘secret,’ for some reason—and it had come to His Excellency, the Governor, from the chief of the General Staff at Simla, who had received it from General Maude through London ! It bore the endorsement of the chief of the Imperial General Staff ! When I realised what a gauntlet my poor little request had had to run I said to myself :

‘Well, no wonder it took twenty-two days ! ’

CHAPTER V

TO THE REMOTEST ZONE

IT was Thursday. General St. John told me that a cabin would be reserved for me on a troopship sailing Saturday at noon, and I spent the intervening forty-eight hours unmaking all the other plans I had made and in getting ready for what proved to be an experience as extraordinary as could possibly be imagined.

My preliminary arrangements for making this trip may be neither interesting nor important to anybody but myself, but to me they were both of these things, exceedingly. I was about to start, entirely alone, for regions which even in Bombay seemed rather dismally remote, and I had no definite idea really where or in whose hands I should land.

Though what with all the importance that had been attached to my going I felt—along with an uncomfortable sense of unworthiness—a certain assurance that I would be taken care of. About the only advice I got from officer friends who had served in Mesopotamia was :

‘Take everything you can think of that you are in the least likely to need, because up there there is literally nothing.’

In Bombay they call it Mesopot. Few persons ever take time to say Mesopotamia. Which is not to be wondered at, since the English have an inveterate habit of nicknaming everything. When everything in Mesopotamia was confusion and defeat, during the awful period when General Townshend was besieged at Kut-el-Amara, Meso-

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pot was thought to be a curiously appropriate contraction. It is spoken now, however, without a shade of meaningful emphasis.

Getting ready to go involved the accumulation of a number of things, including a field kit of bed and bedding and such camp furniture as I was likely to need—and a servant. Accumulating a servant was rather difficult.

Vilayat refused to go. When I told him to prepare himself for a journey up through the waters where the deadly mine is strewn and on to the days-and-days-away place whence come the men who keep always full the ten thousand hospital beds in Bombay, he first got rheumatism in his right knee—oh, an awful pain!—and then remembered that he was a ‘family man.’ No, he would not go, not for three times as much as he was ever paid in his life.

It was pretty short notice. Even if I had had nothing else to do, there was not time enough left to sift the population in a search for another man. But it had to be done. And I did not find it an uninteresting game.

I learned, for one thing, that in India no ‘family man’ should ever be expected to take risks. Word was sent to several employment agencies that I was looking for a servant, and within an hour a flock of applicants had gathered in the corridor outside my door. There was a sample, I think, of every kind of Indian the country produces. There were Hindus, Mohammedans, Christians, and what not; high caste, and low caste, and wholly untouchable; clean and unclean; well-dressed and miserably clad; tall and short; black, yellow, and brown; and every one of them was armed with the usual sheaf of letters which I was expected to read and accept at their face value.

Some of the applicants were suitable enough, but every one I looked upon with any degree of favour turned out to be a ‘family man.’ As soon as they learned that I was going to Mesopotamia they sud-

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denly remembered their wives and children, clutched their precious letters out of my hands, and backed away. Not one of them would go. Moreover, I was assured by friends that it was a hopeless quest.

I was about to give up in despair when Ezekiel came along. Ezekiel is a family man too, but he comes from Pondicherry and boasts that his grandfather was a Frenchman, so he regards the ways of the mere Indian with considerable contempt. In addition to which he was stamped with a certain glory for having been to Mesopot before. He was servant to an army officer during the first year of the war, and in the first paragraph of his essay on himself he always refers to 'my regiment.' It never bores him in the least to tell in detail about how valorous he and it proved themselves to be. And with me he never made capital out of his domestic responsibilities except on the frequent occasions when I threatened to discharge him for being the worst servant who ever got paid for making a general muddle of things. On such occasions he was wont to drag out an old flat wallet in which he carried a photograph of an interesting family group. And there was one 'wee one—ver' white—got French blood—curly hair—oh, lady sahib!—we go back Bombay—I bring—you see!' That was Ezekiel.

I should not regard it as a calamity if I had to do all my travelling on British troopships. When you wish to convey a general sum-up of the environment of an Englishman who is provided with every comfort and convenience that any reasonable man could reasonably require, you say :

'He does himself rather well.'

And the Englishman does himself exceedingly well when he goes to war. Not that he is incapable of going to war unprovided and exposed to all the hardships there are—he has done that in Mesopotamia—but he can be trusted by his worrying wife

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or mother to eliminate the hardships as rapidly as possible, and he does not consider a fondness for comfortable surroundings a sign of weakness.

The trooper I travelled on was built for the trade routes in the Bay of Bengal, and used to ply between Calcutta and Singapore, with stops at Rangoon and Penang on the way. She is not very large. But she is seaworthy, and has ample spaces between decks. These spaces were once used for cargo, but they have been made habitable now with rows upon rows of bunks and berths. Many baths have been built in, and there are large mess-rooms for British troops.

Officers' quarters are amidships on the main deck and are the self-same cabins that American tourists probably complained about in years gone by when only tourists were catered to, and when the armoured cruiser variety of cockroach was thought in Eastern seas to be among the necessary evils, along with un-holy smells and the unrestricted disorderliness of lower-deck passengers. There is nothing like that now. No insects of any kind, no unnecessary odours, and no confusion at all. The well-being of the troops is the first consideration of the authorities, and on a troopship one lives under military discipline, and enjoys a consequent maximum of comfort.

After bestowing myself in the cabin reserved for me, I climbed to the spotless upper deck to watch the men come aboard. There were more than a thousand of them—three hundred and fifty Tommies, and the others Indian troops. And it really seemed, as they came in unbroken line up the sloping gangway, like going off to the war. Everything was so methodical that there was not even a sound above the ordinary hum of quiet talk, and the embarkation proceedings were over and done with before one realised that they had more than begun. We had only to wait for final inspection before casting off.

The embarkation officers in the port of Bombay

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all wear big red or green silk pompoms on their helmets, and are very smart in their get-up generally, the embarkation service being among the things to which the busy war-working population of the city likes to 'point with pride.'

Incidentally it is the hardest-worked service connected in any way with military operations. Every dock in the snug inner harbour—and they measure thousands of feet—was crowded with supply-ships, hospital ships, and transports, while in the wide outer harbour lay many more at anchor, waiting for vacated berths. But the men who are doing this work have achieved an admirable orderliness, and nobody ever seems to be in a hurry about anything. It is just that the movement never stops.

A transport with a thousand troops aboard, as well as army officers, ship's officers, medical officers, coolie corps, and crew, is a haven of peace. One would expect it to be a kind of bedlam. It is not. Hour by hour I sat on deck reading, and hearing not a sound but the throb of the engines and the backward wash of the sea against the ship's sides. Yet wherever I looked there were uniformed figures. There were a great many junior officers—very junior some of them—who behaved with a sedateness to be expected perhaps of early youth burdened with grave responsibilities. They stretched themselves out in cool corners and slept the hours away, or they sat in groups flat on the deck, playing cards.

A few senior officers more or less monopolised the little library and whiled away the time at bridge. Once in a while on the decks forward, where the British boys were located, a number of fresh young voices would be lifted in close harmony, or a shout of infectious laughter would float up to the regions of the exalted where I dwelt, but not often.

The Indian troops were bestowed aft and between-decks, and they gave the junior officers something occasionally to do. There were so many of them

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that they could not all be on deck at the same time, so they had to be exercised in squads. They did not like it, the officers told me, and would have preferred to lie in their bunks the week through, but they boarded the ship in the pink of condition and keeping them fit was a part of the day's work.

Our Indians belonged to what is known as a mixed regiment, part Mohammedan and part Hindu. And this kind of mixture complicates the business of the quartermaster's department in an extraordinary way. In order to avoid the defilement which a man of one faith would inflict upon a man of the other by touching his food they have to have separate commissariat arrangements all the way through from training-camp to battle-field. They will train together and fight together, but that is the extent of their association. So it happens that they have to have separate galleys on the troop-ships. Those on our ship were very interesting. They were common kitchen ranges strung along the rails of the well-deck aft, with ordinary stove-pipe hung on wire and projecting rather grotesquely out over the sides just under the canvas awning. They imparted to the ship a kind of gipsy air wholly out of keeping with her serious business.

To add a touch of completeness to the Sabbath-like calm which prevailed on the ship I read the Bible. Becoming intensely interested, I tried to read it through in twenty-four hours. This cannot be done. Incidentally, I had some difficulty in finding one. It is a sign of the times, I am afraid, that one never gets a Bible any more as a going-away present when one starts off on a long journey. Though I might better say, perhaps, that it was a sign of unintelligence on my part that I did not think to carry with me one of several that were bestowed upon me in godlier days.

I was going to Baghdad, was I not? When I left New York I believed I was. I was on my way

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to the Land of the Two Rivers ; the land of the Garden of Eden ; ‘the Cradle of the World’ ! It is the land not only of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, but the land as well of Noah and Father Abraham ; the land of Babylonia, where Daniel dwelt in captivity with the Children of Israel and was delivered from the den of lions because he served his God continually ; the land where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into the furnace heated ‘one seven times more than it was wont to be heated,’ and were delivered without hurt because they would ‘not serve nor worship any god except their own God’ ; a land about which no book has ever been written that does not bristle with references to Genesis, to Ezra and the Chronicles and the Kings, to Samuel and Daniel and Jeremiah. So I might have known that a Bible would be absolutely necessary to me if I expected to look upon anything with eyes of intelligence.

Parenthetically, I should like to remark that being chaplain to troops serving in Mesopotamia is about the easiest billet a man could possibly have. His sermons are all ready made for him. Talk about sermons in stones, books in the running brooks ! There is a sermon in every glint of sunlight on the Mesopotamian desert ; in every mound of sand that covers an ancient ruin ; in every bend and ripple of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates.

I found a Bible finally, hidden away with the hymnals and the prayer-books in a wainscot cupboard of the little library, and, while I intended merely to get the stories of Babylon and of Ur of the Chaldees, I became engrossed in the story of the Children of Israel and followed it all the way through. Then I had to read the Prophets, and, having pondered over their prophecies, I was tempted to re-examine the fulfilment of them. And afterwards I was very glad I did. It refreshed my memory of many things I had thought little about since the days of my youth.

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In Mesopotamia you live the story of the Bible, and you do not wonder in the least if it is true ; you know it is. You become as definitely acquainted with Daniel and Ezra ; yes, and with Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, and Noah and Abraham and Hagar and Ishmael—especially Hagar and Ishmael—and a thousand others, as though they were alive to-day. And in a way they are. As they have come down to us through the ages in tradition and picture they are exact prototypes of the men who now inhabit that ancient land.

We came at last into the Gulf of Oman, with the coasts of Sind and Baluchistan on one side and the Arabian peninsula on the other. And it was like stealing silently through a great silence. The glassy, glaring surface of the sea was disturbed by nothing but an occasional flying-fish leaping out of the ship's path and skimming away to safety. The distant shores—rugged, precipitous, and forbidding—were like imagined abodes of the dead. And even the fishing-junks were lifeless. They lay becalmed on every side, widely scattered over the sea ; high-prowed, heavy-hulled—of another age than this—with great brown sails hanging limp on slanting masts.

Over to the westward on the Arabian side lay Muskat. We could not see it, but we knew it was there—a British naval station prickly with unpleasant memories. We knew all about the scorching, soul-withering dreadfulness of it and about the gaunt, jagged cliffs that ring its harbour. On the sheer outward wall of one of these is carved the name of every British fighting-ship that ever sailed or steamed this way.

Motionless we seemed to lie in the midst of a world that had halted to the command : Peace ! Be still ! But we were moving slowly onward, and eventually rounded a sharp headland on the Arabian coast and came into the Persian Gulf. They were

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storied waters we were steaming through ; waters that have sent back crackling echoes to many a gun.

British ‘occupation’ of lower Mesopotamia and the country immediately round the Persian Gulf antedates the war by several centuries, and the story of it begins with the dislodgment of the Portuguese from the now deserted island of Hormuz. If I ever knew, I have forgotten why the Portuguese had to be dislodged. But those were the days of uncharted seas and of merchant adventurers who sailed them in search of adventure and who needed little excuse for warlike demonstration.

The British East India Company had reached a trade agreement with the Shah of Persia, and one naturally supposes that the Portuguese sought to interfere with the legitimate advance of British interests. The only easily rememberable item in connection with the first British engagement in the gulf is that one of the two Englishmen who lost their lives in it was William Baffin, the discoverer of Baffin Bay.

‘Master Baffin went on shore with his geometrical instruments for the better levelling of his piece to make his shot,’ writes a contemporary correspondent, ‘but as he was about the same he received a small shot from the Castle into his belly, wherewith he gave three leapes, by report, and died immediately.’

And so passed William Baffin. This dramatic small incident could hardly be improved upon as a beginning of England’s dramatic record in this part of the world, and it might interest Master Baffin to know that the desolate coast of his last earthly vision is now landmarked for Englishmen by many tragic, mud-walled, small God’s acres filled with white crosses and shafts of marble brought from over the seas he sailed. It is said that at many a point on the shores of the Persian Gulf ‘the dead alone guard the colours that are being borne afresh in Mesopotamia to-day.’

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For generations the favourite occupations of the coast Arabs in these regions have been piracy, slave-trading, and gun-running. And it must be taken into consideration that Turkey's notoriety for iniquitous governmental methods is no new thing, and that Turkish overlordship in the Arabian peninsula has never been a success. It has never been a success up along the Tigris and Euphrates, either, but in those regions there has been some semblance of control. At Basra and at points above there have always been Turkish pashas representing the Sublime Porte as resident governors, and they have been backed by military garrisons.

Below Basra there are two great divisions of the Arab peoples. They are themselves divided into many tribes and tribal groups, but are allied in strong confederations—on the Mesopotamian side of the gulf to resist Turkish aggression, and on the Persian side to resist Persian interference with ancient rights and liberties—and they have never acknowledged any authority except that of their own sheikhs.

The two most important of these Arab chieftains are the Sheikh of Kuweit and the Sheikh of Muhammerah, and if these two had not been lifelong friends of Britain, upholding a traditional friendship of their fathers before them, the occupation of Mesopotamia by British troops would have been much more difficult.

The principality of the Sheikh of Kuweit—extending one hundred and sixty miles in one direction and one hundred and ninety miles in another—lies on the Mesopotamian side of the upper gulf, and has been ruled by the family of the patriarchal old Jabir-ibn-Mubarak, who rules it now, since the middle of the seventeenth century.

The territories of the Sheikh of Muhammerah are in Persian Arabistan, just across on the other side, and together these two picturesque rulers can provide a force of fifty-odd thousand men armed

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with good serviceable rifles. They have provided no force to support the British, but they easily could have provided such a force to oppose them had they been persuaded to ally themselves with the Turks.

But it is due almost entirely to England's friendly assistance in the past that these sheikhs are what they are, and that they are able to exercise even a partial control over their numerous and turbulent tribes.

It was to the interest of everybody economically concerned in the regions round about, and especially of the Sheikh of Kuweit, that piracy should be suppressed in the Persian Gulf. Pearling is one of the chief pursuits of the coast Arabs—there being the two wonderful little islands of Bahrein and Mubarak just south of Kuweit, the pearl fisheries of which have netted their owners in a good year as much as half a million pounds sterling—and in the pearling season, particularly, the upper gulf has always been a pirates' paradise.

Turkey could not patrol these waters, though, considering her claim to sovereignty over them, it was her business to do so. The Arab sheikhs had no naval vessels of any kind, and Persia was helpless. It therefore fell to the lot of England to police the gulf, just as it has fallen to the lot of England to police nearly all the otherwise unpoliced waters of the earth.

From the beginning British influence rapidly increased, this being due not so much to the greater energy and enterprise of the English traders as to the fact that England was willing to undertake the establishment and maintenance of peaceful conditions in the ports and the safeguarding of navigation in the gulf. English influence with the Mesopotamian peoples has been the result of nothing but the honourable and generally satisfactory discharge on England's part of tremendous responsibilities.

During the whole of the nineteenth century the

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British army and navy were used unsparingly in a never-ending effort to suppress the notorious slave-trade with the East Coast of Africa. But it is a notable fact that before mere British supremacy of influence gave way in 1914 to absolute British control in the gulf, the iniquitous traffic in human beings was by no means extinct. And to realise the extent of slavery in all parts of Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia one has only to observe the evidence of African blood in vast numbers of the people and the presence among the tribes of innumerable black human beasts of burden.

Mesopotamia is inhabited solely by Arab tribes, and the Arabs are all Mohammedans. But the Mohammedans of the world are divided into two main sects by irreconcilable differences of religious opinion ; sects which in Mesopotamia have indulged in innumerable fearful contests for supremacy, all of which have tended to sink the country further and further into moral ruin and material exhaustion.

The two great Mohammedan sects are the Sunnis and the Shias. The Sunnis acknowledge the succession of the first four Khaliphs and the right of the Sultan of Turkey to the spiritual and temporal predominance bequeathed by the Prophet, and the greatest tribe of Sunni Arabs in Mesopotamia and eastern Arabia—the Muntafik—joined the Turks at the beginning of the war, and have succeeded, by frequent raids and constant guerrilla warfare, in making things very unpleasant at times for the British on the river Euphrates.

But the Shias deny the succession of the first four Khaliphs and recognise as the true heir of the Prophet the Imam Ali, who married Mohammed's daughter Fatima. The sons of Fatima, Al-Hasan and Al-Husein, rebelled against the Khaliphate and, according to Shah belief, were treacherously slain. They became the martyrs of the Shah sect, and the anniversary of their death became the

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principal Shiah Mohammedan holy day. It is celebrated throughout the Shiah world—which includes a large part of Mohammedan India—with processions of mourning and, in some localities, with a frenzied fanaticism which expresses itself in self-flagellation and other forms of self-torture, and in murderous attacks on men of other faiths. The Shias, of course, do not acknowledge the Sultan of Turkey. Rather they abhor what they regard as his usurpation of a holy office. And a fact which relieves the British situation of at least one complication is that a majority of the Arabs behind the British lines in Mesopotamia are Shias.

The holy cities of the Sunnis are Mecca and Medina in western Arabia, while the chief places of devout pilgrimage for the Shias are Kerbela and Nejef, west of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia. Kerbela contains the tomb of the martyr Husein, while the sacred shrine of Ali is at Nejef. And these two towns are now in the hands of the British, who are adepts, from long practice, in the gentle art of respecting other peoples' beliefs.

So much for the general situation. After which the German intention. It is known that for twenty-five years or more the Germans have been laying foundations and developing schemes for the colonisation and eventual control of Mesopotamia and the lands round the Persian Gulf, and that these schemes carried with them a direct threat against British supremacy in the Indian Empire.

The Kaiser bought the concessions involved in the Berlin-to-Baghdad Railroad project by condoning Abdul Hamid's fiendish Bulgarian atrocities in the Balkans. At that time every self-respecting nation on the face of the earth was aghast with horror at the unbelievable crimes of that monstrous Turk, but we now know the Kaiser believes that certain considerations justify the massacre of innocents, and we know that by expressing this belief to

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the Sultan he was able then to enter into a brotherly compact with him. And the first thing England knew her influence in Constantinople and throughout Turkey began to be systematically undermined, while the results of successful German diplomacy began to be increasingly evident.

It is in a bright white light revealing many things that we view in these days the historic visit of the Kaiser to the Turkish Empire and his brother, the Sultan, when, in Damascus, he grandiloquently proclaimed himself the 'Defender of Islam.' All of which was some time after definite German-Turkish intrigues and conspiracies began to come to light, and some time after it was realised that the Berlin-to-Baghdad-and-beyond Railroad was to be Germany's political highway to the Eastern seas.

The first conspiracy of any consequence was in 1903, when it was discovered that, simultaneously with a German attempt to get a concession for a railway terminus at Kuweit, the Turkish Government was bringing pressure of all kinds to bear upon the independent Sheikh to induce him to accept Turkish nationality and title along with Turkish sovereignty over his ancient hereditary domain. This the Sheikh obstinately refused to do, refusing at the same time the German demand. But in the face of an eventual Turkish ultimatum he had to appeal to his old-time British friends and declare his inability to maintain his position without their support.

It was probably in no altruistic spirit whatever that the British responded. A German invasion of Kuweit, with the inevitable result of German control in the Persian Gulf, was not to be thought of. And so it happened that they assured the Sheikh of their unfailing support, and declared that they would tolerate no attack upon him from any direction.

The British senior naval officer in the gulf fleet drew up a scheme of defence and landed some guns and marines to augment the forces of the Sheikh ; then they sat down to await whatever might come

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to pass. But the Turks, not being prepared for anything so internationally serious, drew back, and the incident was closed. It had no result except that it strengthened the bond between Britain and the Arab rulers. Though it did establish a kind of recognised status for everybody concerned which the British did everything humanly possible during the ten years preceding the war to maintain.

One more item of special interest and importance : In 1901 an Englishman, Mr. W. K. D'Arcy, obtained from H.R.H. the Shah a concession for working petroleum in all its forms in southern Persia. Mr. D'Arcy was 'playing a lone hand.' He was a courageous Englishman, and he spent large sums of money in prospecting from one field to another, but without success. It was just that he had unlimited faith. He exhausted his original capital, I believe, and was then able to interest other capital in Burma and India as well as in England. He went on prospecting, and eventually, in 1908, he discovered the long-sought-for area and tapped what proved to be an immense and practically inexhaustible oil-field. This field is in Arabistan, within the territories over which the Sheikh of Muhammerah exercises control.

The waters of the Tigris and Euphrates join about one hundred miles above the head of the Persian Gulf, and flow down to the sea in a mighty stream called the Shatt-el-Arab. And in the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab lies an island called Abadan, on which the Anglo-Persian Oil Company established its tanks and refineries. Abadan is one hundred and fifty miles from the oil-fields in Arabistan, so a double pipe-line was laid to bring the product down, and the newly created town of Abadan, about midway of the island, rapidly developed into a great oil-shipping port. It was one of those curious swift developments of peace-times.

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It all took place after 1908, and by 1912 the pipelines and refineries were in operation. It was an all-British concern from the outset, the Persian end of it representing nothing by way of capital, but enjoying a great deal eventually by way of royalty.

Then early in 1914 the British Admiralty bought a controlling interest in the enterprise on the strength of weighty considerations which had to do with the increasing use of oil in His Majesty's Navy, and the rather extraordinary trend of political events in the immediate vicinity. The Admiralty was roundly criticised at the time for this seemingly unjustifiable extravagance, but it was about the only bit of preparedness that England was guilty of, and justification has since been overwhelmingly abundant.

Fuel is one of the many things necessary to the successful prosecution of a war which Mesopotamia does not possess, and without the plentiful supply of it close at hand which these Persian oil-fields fortunately afford, the operations of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force would have been much more difficult than they have been, and they have been difficult enough.

There is a bar at the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab, a great barrier of silt that has done more to try the souls of the men responsible for the continuity of supplies and communications in Mesopotamia than any other one thing. On account of it all ships, of whatever draught, must be timed with reference to the tide, while the larger vessels of the supply and transport fleet cannot cross it at all and must stop outside while their cargoes are transferred to river steamboats or barges. The volume of desert sand washed down by the river is so great that dredging and maintaining a deep channel is thought to be an operation of too great magnitude to be undertaken as anything but a permanent development. So the British worry along.

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Whether or not we should ‘get up to the bar on time’ was a subject of great importance and of much discussion. If we did not we should be held up a whole day in the glare and heat of the upper gulf. We were to cross the bar at midnight—the sixth and the last night from Bombay—and the skipper assured us that we would make it and have a good hour to spare.

But in my little book of occasional notes which always intends to be a diary, and never is, I find two brief items to remind me that, small as our old trooper was, we had some difficulty in getting over the bar. In fact, we must have had a horrible night.

Says the note-book :

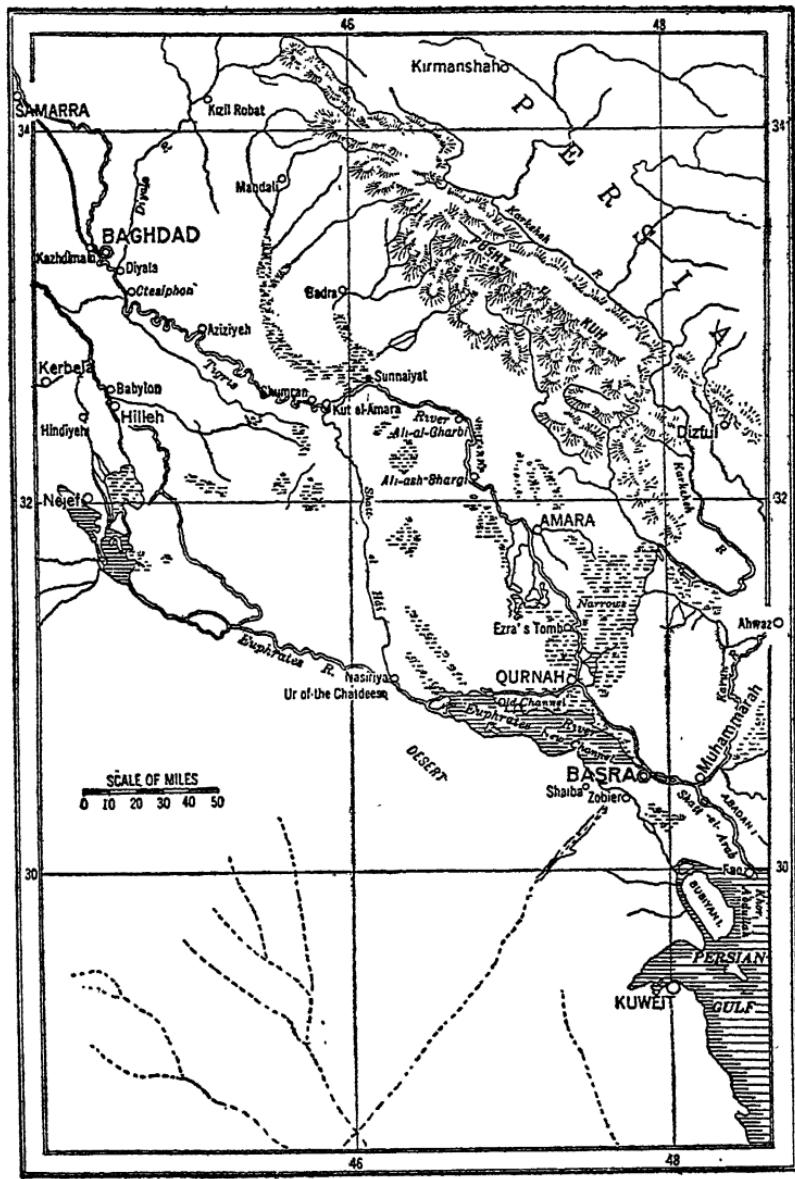
12.30 A.M.—We are just starting over the bar. The engines have stopped ; the lead is being cast ; a musical young voice rings out in the silence, calling the depths. We move slowly under our own headway. A final cast ; the distant clang of an engine-room signal ; the engines begin to throb again, and we are under way—very slowly, very carefully.

It is a still, hot night, with not a fleck or ripple even in the path of moonlight which lies across the sea. I am thinking that for many a young man aboard this ship it really is ‘crossing the bar,’ so many of them are likely to find the end of youth and of life in ‘the cradle of the world.’

Somewhat later :

3 A.M.—Going over the bar was not so simple, after all. We are still going over, and the old ship sounds as though she would break into a thousand pieces at any moment. I wonder—! But they wouldn’t do it if they didn’t think they could ! We’re flat in the mud, no doubt about that. And the feel of it as we creep along inch by inch ! Oh—h-h ! Why should a ship aground feel like that ?

The engines pant and puff for a few moments ; then they are still as though they had paused for rest. There is a powerful deep-sea-going tug on either side, and they seem to be tearing their very hearts out. We’ll never do it !



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But of course we did. I do not know when or how. I waked up in the midst of the utmost placidity, and managed to get on deck just as we were passing the town of Abadan.

Having heard so much about the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, it was with considerable interest and curiosity that I looked for the first time upon the evidences of its greatness. A forest of smoke-stacks and acres of enormous grey tanks could hardly be regarded as ornamental in an otherwse alluring landscape, nor would an ever-present and nicely blended odour of oils in all the stages of refinement and unrefinement be an attraction for the seeker after a desirable place of residence. But when the concomitant of such undesirable things is an assurance, in these days of economic severities, of a plentiful supply of fuel oil and gasolene at prices 'within the easy reach,' and so forth, one is able to look upon them with a certain degree of approval.

The company has built for the British martyrs to the general good who have to live at Abadan a row of very comfortable residences along the upper bank of the river. These houses are more or less cheek by jowl with 'the works,' to be sure, but they command a view to the north and the westward of a wide sweep of palm-fringed river against a background of grey and yellow desert, unmarred by oil-tanks or any other evidence of human activity.

Forty miles farther up—about sixty miles from the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab—is Basra, the port of the Mesopotamian zone. And the Shatt-el-Arab is bordered its full length on either side by a mile-wide band of date plantations, the tall palms being set in even rows, between which one gets glimpses into deep, green, converging distances. In places the groves thin down to mere river fringes, while an occasional isolated giant lifts its plumes up to the blue of the sky, or stately groups, unevenly grown and wind bent, are etched in fascinating lines against a desert that rolls away and away to

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the ends of nowhere. I think to myself, ‘I’m going to like all this !’

But then I remember a young British officer in hospital at Bombay, who had just come down with his nerves shredded from overwork and his vitality all burned up with sand-fly fever. He said to me :

‘Can’t see why anybody should want to go to Mesopot ! Except, of course, that you are going on up to Baghdad. That may be worth while, though I doubt it. Never been to Baghdad myself. No such luck ! The army’s no tourist party, you know. I’ve had to stick to coolie corps and mule-depots at Basra. Still, I suppose somebody’s got to.’

An expression crossed his face which conveyed to me whole volumes of unpleasant recollection, and he added :

‘Mesopot ! I assure you that all you ’ll want to see you can see through a port-hole of your ship. Then you ’ll want to turn right round and come back !’

I laughed and ventured to predict that as soon as he had recovered a little of his lost ginger he would be longing to return himself, and in a whimsical kind of way he acknowledged that likely as not he would.

‘It ’s probably the most unpleasant hole topside o’ Hades,’ he said, ‘but there isn’t any doubt that it has a kind of fiendish fascination. Chaps get so interested in what they are doing that they have actually been known to refuse a month’s leave when it was offered to them ! They stick it till they get shoved out on a stretcher, same as me !’

I wondered. Steaming slowly on up the Shatt-el-Arab, and into an area of war communications that was crowded with a variety of commonplace and anciently curious craft, I wondered. . . .

CHAPTER VI

WHAT THE BRITISH FOUND

ACCORDING to advice offered in a small book of instructions to British officers with regard to equipping themselves for service in Mesopotamia :

‘To spend a year in this delectable land you will require three outfits of clothing—one suitable for an English winter ; one suitable for an English summer ; and an outfit suitable for Hades !’

So perhaps the tired-out young officer was right when he called it ‘the most unpleasant hole topside o’ Hades,’ but one soon learns that it deserves also his reluctant admission that it possesses a kind of ‘fiendish fascination.’

In Mesopotamia climate gets more attention than any other one thing, and it is the first thing to be taken into consideration in every move that is made—that is, if such consideration is possible. It is not that there are so many varieties of climate, but that the few varieties there are exaggerate themselves so outrageously.

Believe, if you can, that men are able to live and work and fight in a temperature which, for months on end, seldom drops below 110° F., and which frequently climbs—especially under canvas—to 130°. It is not believable, is it ? Yet, along in March the Mesopotamian sun sets in to establish such records as these, and through June, July, August, and September, the records are held with a pitiless persistence which tries the souls of men and often enough wrecks the bodies of the strongest.

So it is that Mesopotamian Horror Number One is the Mesopotamian sun. During the summer of

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1917 five hundred and nineteen men of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force died of heat and sunstroke. Yet by 1917 almost faultless facilities for combating these twin evils had been established throughout the country. Ice is a first necessity, and there are certain hydropathic processes which reduce the fearful temperature of the body and for which special hospital equipment is required. In the beginning there were none of these things ; the medical services were practically empty-handed ; and the requisites were provided only with the to-be-expected promptness which we usually express with the word 'eventually.'

Now, however, where British troops are located there are ice-plants, and there is not a hospital anywhere, from the farthest evacuation outpost behind the lines of action to the last convalescent station on the Shatt-el-Arab, that is not equipped with special and detached facilities for the instant care of the man who gets 'knocked on the head by the sun.'

When this happens there is no time to rig up paraphernalia for treating the victim in an ordinary ward, so in connection with all the hospitals there is a sunstroke hut or tent—a place set aside and kept constantly in readiness for the instant emergency which sunstroke or heatstroke always presents.

One wonders how many men the sun killed during the terrific campaign of 1915, before England was prepared in any way to fight in Mesopotamia.

Throughout the hot season—and the hot season always telescopes the cool season, beginning with short periods in the earliest spring, and lingering far into the autumn—the British soldier has to wear the detested and detestable sun-helmet and spine-pad, and it is a joy to him when, in the orders of the day along late in November, he begins to get permission to leave them off after stated hours.

The second, and hardly less to be dreaded, horror is the pest of insect life. Practically every town on

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the rivers is surrounded by groves of date-palms, while, as I have said, the date plantations on the banks of the Shatt-el-Arab extend to a depth of a mile or more on either side. These groves—or date-gardens, as they are called—are intersected by numerous small creeks and irrigation ditches which, while they are practically dry for months at a time, always contain stagnant small pools here and there that serve as breeding-places for all the varieties there are of malarial and fever-carrying mosquitoes.

But fighting mosquitoes is not such a difficult thing. It has been done successfully otherwheres, and it is being done most successfully in Mesopotamia. Besides, a man can escape mosquitoes, at least during the night, by being provided with a net.

The sand-fly, however, is a different creature altogether, and is the worst enemy the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force has encountered. Next to Germany it is Turkey's most venomous ally and has incapacitated thousands of men. It is so small as to be all but invisible, and it mobilises in the great deserts in armies of quintillions. There are times when every inch of air space seems to be filled with sand-flies. No net was ever made that was fine enough to keep them out, and it is said by those who ought to know that 'they can get through anything but armour plate.' When they get a chance to settle on a man they proceed to dig in and eat him up, producing a variety of torture that nothing else can equal. Then, in too many instances, comes a slow, wasting, prostrating fever which nearly always necessitates a trip on a stretcher down the Persian Gulf to a hospital somewhere in India.

The British army in Mesopot now meets the sand-fly—and the mosquito—with all its exposed surfaces carefully smeared with oily and pungent lotions which are issued by the authorities as a part of necessary soldier equipment. But I will say

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that it took a long time to discover the right article, and that there is great division of opinion on the subject even yet, most officers, at least, having each his own pet brand of unpleasant cream.

It would be overdrawing the picture, perhaps, to mention scorpions and such crawling creatures of the desert and the palm-groves. They infest the land, it is true, but not in sufficient numbers seriously to interfere with an army that wears large boots. They are to be dreaded only because they are such nightmarish things.

Along in October the climate begins to improve a little, and by the beginning of November it has been known to be, in some respects, positively delightful. But by that time the country from one end to the other is hub-deep in fine dust which blows up in blinding, stinging clouds; seeps into everything; covers one's clothes and belongings; grits in one's teeth; burns in one's eyes; grinds into one's flesh, and irritates everlastingily.

Even so, the dusty autumn with its cool days and restful nights is greatly to be preferred to the ensuing short season when the penetrating chill of a particularly disagreeable winter is accompanied by deluge after deluge of wind-driven rain which turns the dust into a sea of a peculiarly Mesopotamian variety of glutinous mud that clings to whatever it touches, and, by miring man, beast, and vehicle, clogs the progress of every kind of enterprise.

Not a pleasant country any way you consider it, one might say. Yet, strangely enough, it is a country of infinite variation, and its 'fiendish fascination' is a subtle, alluring something beyond one's power to describe. It inevitably 'gets' every foreigner who comes in intimate contact with it.

Fortunately for the British troops, their first operations in Mesopotamia were carried out during the winter months. Had it been earlier in the year

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there probably would have been more deaths among them from sunstroke and fever than from Turkish lead. But as it was, they had only to contend against such conditions as are brought about by lack of shelter, inadequate supply transport, adhesive mud or ankle-deep slush, and an almost continuous downpour.

There are officers in Mesopotamia now who came in with the first expedition, who have been through the whole big show, and expect to see it through to the end. And these men like to tell the story of the first landing.

Of the great armada that sailed from Bombay in the middle of October 1914, the four transports and one gunboat that were bound for the Persian Gulf steamed up and anchored on the 23rd of October off the pearl island of Bahrein.

The general supposition was that this force had been sent to guard the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's properties at Abadan, but, as England was not yet at war with Turkey, nobody knew definitely against what or whom. The ships lay at Bahrein until the 1st of November, and without a line of news from the outside world. At a time, too, when the world was thrilling with the most important events in all history. The officers passed the time expressing to one another their disgust and exasperation, going through unsatisfactory landing-drills, dealing with discontent among the crews, and writing in little note-books—some of which I have had the privilege of reading—luridly vituperative accounts of their various tribulations.

Eventually, however, on the 1st of November, orders were received to move this force on up the gulf towards Fao, a fortified town on the Mesopotamian bank at the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab, which was of considerable international importance and contained two telegraph offices, one Turkish and the other British. And not even the commanding general himself knew then that England

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and Turkey were at war, though a declared state of war between them had existed for more than twenty-four hours. Which goes to show what communications were like in those days.

In fact, it was not until two o'clock in the afternoon of the 2nd of November that this contingent was informed by signal message that it had regular work to do. The message read :

Please inform the troops that a state of war now exists between England and Turkey. Ever since the beginning of the war between England and Germany, England has made every endeavour to maintain peace and uphold the ancient friendship with Turkey, but, urged on by German intrigue, Turkey has made successive acts of aggression, and England is now compelled to declare war. This force has been sent to the gulf to safeguard our interests and to protect friendly Arabs from Turkish attack.

So far so good ! The men now knew more or less what to expect, and discontent among them gave way to hope that there would be 'something doing' in the very immediate future.

There was. The immediate order was to occupy Fao, and this order was executed on schedule time. A landing was effected at Fao on the 6th of November, and the Turks, after a brief resistance, cleared out and started on their long retreat to the north. And that they fled from Fao rather precipitately was proved by the character of the loot they left behind them for the British to gather up. The guns they abandoned were practically undamaged, while those in the old fort were found loaded and ready for firing.

'My !' said Master Tommy, 'those boys were in a hurry !'

But friendly Arabs of the neighbourhood volunteered the information that the Basra garrison of eight thousand men, strongly reinforced by troops from Baghdad, was moving down to join the retreating force, and that the British were to be



Headquarters Staff, Lines of Communication. Major-General Sir George MacMunn, the I.G.C.,

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attacked by vastly superior numbers and driven back into the gulf.

The British, however, moved on without delay, the object being to forestall an attack on Abadan. And this important point they succeeded in placing behind them within forty-eight hours. The Turks are said to have dropped just one shell into Abadan, but if it had dropped on the right spot it probably would have been sufficient.

On the 14th of November reinforcements, both naval and military, arrived from India, and the British began offensive operations with the definite object of taking Basra, an object which they accomplished in just nine days.

As it is spoken of in a casual kind of way nowadays, the British advance from Fao up to Basra sounds as though it might have been an easy performance. It was not. It was the modern Briton's first encounter with Mesopotamian difficulties, and, knowing practically nothing about them, he could only meet them pell-mell and take the consequences.

The advance had to be made through closely set date plantations hung for miles on end with entangling grape-vines, and intersected by innumerable unbridged creeks and ditches. The whole country was a morass, while down along the river-bank were great salt mud-flats that are always deeply flooded at high tide.

The Turks fought from ambush, behind the thick boles of the palms, from under the banks of canals, and from previously prepared and concealed dug-outs, while the wounded—having been told by their German officers to expect no quarter—accounted for many an Englishman and Indian by rolling over where they lay and shooting officers and men at close range. There are recorded instances of men being killed as they were hurrying to the assistance of a fallen enemy.

Though perhaps I should say at once that, so

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far as I have heard, this is the only recorded instance of Turkish disregard of the rules of fair fighting in straight battle.

'Our men were extremely humane,' writes one British officer, 'and not only assisted wounded Turks, but also gave them cigarettes and any food they had, and the Turks were tremendously surprised. They were told to sell their lives as dearly as possible, because if they fell they surely would have to die. What rotten lies! Our Pathans were almost too considerate, even halting in important movements to help the wounded and the dying.'

The Turks did not offer a long-continued resistance. They were in overwhelmingly superior numbers, but, having retreated on Basra, they immediately abandoned that important base and rather bolted than retreated to previously prepared positions to the northward on the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. The final twenty-eight miles of the British advance were undisputed, and this distance was covered in a single day—a performance which the self-communing officer of the frankest notebook describes as a disgrace.

'No staff arrangements at all,' says he, 'and men, both British and Indian, footsore and weary, strung out all over the whole wretched country! There is no doubt that our generals have just been pushing on as rapidly as they could over the difficult route, and expecting more of the men than men are capable of. Twenty-eight miles in one day over ordinary muddy roads would be bad enough, but such a march at a fast pace through the kind of thick, slimy mud we have to encounter here is simply preposterous and enough to render the men useless for a week!'

That officer, being an old-timer of the regular army, was annoyed. But Basra was occupied on the 23rd of November, and the reckless advance was accounted—as it really was—a valuable

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victory and a fine exhibition of British grit and determination.

At Basra, considering the immediate necessities, the British found literally nothing. The old town has little to do with necessities now, but at that time it was important. It is about two miles inland from the river, and to the westward of it lies only a boundless expanse of sand. It was a typically Turkish-Arab town, filthy and unsanitary beyond description, and left inhabited after the Turkish evacuation chiefly by a mob of surly and truculent Arabs, who, while they had found Turkish misrule always intolerable, gave promise of finding British law and order even more so.

But the British were interested in the river-banks on which they would have to establish port facilities. Every man and every animal and every ounce of food for both, as well as munitions and equipment and the necessary materials for developing and maintaining a war zone, would have to be brought from overseas, and it was a serious outlook.

There were two or three foreign consulates that would serve well enough for departmental headquarters, and a new custom-house shed that would come in handy for warehousing supplies. Also—Basra having been chosen as the gulf terminal of the Berlin-to-Baghdad-and-beyond Railroad—there was one temporary German railway wharf, the beginnings of some freight-sheds, and a few valuable materials lying about. Otherwise, as a base from which to supply and to direct the operations of an army destined to the kind of service into which this first force was immediately thrust, the place was a total blank.

Roads, lights, telephones, vehicles, housing facilities, civilised conveniences of any kind—there were none! In order to get any conception at all of subsequent events and developments it is necessary to realise this. After which it is necessary to get,

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if possible, a sweeping kind of vision of a country stretching away and away to the east and the west in limitless desolation, and rolling northward in waves and wastes of grey and yellow desert, through which two shallow, slow-flowing rivers—empty then of transport and at times all but unnavigable—wind a tortuous way.

CHAPTER VII

NOT THROUGH A PORT-HOLE

IT was early morning when I arrived at Basra, and I stood for two hours or more at the deck-rail, wondering vaguely why somebody did not come to take me ashore, while I watched with intense interest the disembarkation of the troops we had brought, and a scene along the river-bank of toilsome and bewilderingly multifarious industry. It was war—twentieth century war—in the process of destroying for all time the somnolent peace of a world that has drowsed for ages in Eastern dreams.

The Arabs—children of the desert and inheritors of noiseless ease and ancient methods—say, ‘The British came with the smoke.’ But it was the other way round. The smoke came with the British, and it rolls to-day—in black spirals of industrial abomination—from workshops innumerable, from electric power-plants, from many steamboats, and from tall chimneys and funnels of every kind all round the horizon. And with the British came also the loud murmur and the clatter and clank of toil, the shrill shriek of the locomotive, and the honk of the horn of the motor.

The Arabs say, also, ‘Leisure is God-given and haste is of the Evil One.’ They never worked before in all their lives, but they are working now, and they are working with a rapidity and cheerfulness which denote much with regard to the reward they get and the character of the discipline they are under.

But the scene on the amazing river-bank looked to me like the utmost in disorderliness and con-

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fusion. Docks and wharves were lined with ships and crowded with men and women—coolies—working ant-fashion, coming and going in endless lines, carrying on heads and bent backs boxes and bales of materials and materials. Acres of low sheds stretching away into the fringes of the palm-groves; miles of closely-tented open space, seen hazily through clouds of dust; pyramids of hay and sacked grain under light-green canvas; mule-wagons; motor-lorries; ammunition-carts; ambulances; an artillery convoy getting under way out across a baked grey waste in the distance; automobiles hurrying hither and thither; officers on handsome horses moving slowly here and there; a long line of diminutive donkeys tricked out in brightly ornamented pack-saddles, and with jingling halters and strings of blue beads round their necks; a longer line of ambling, munching, disdainful-nosed camels on the way down to the adjoining dock, where they were being swung up one by one, like so many bales of hay, and deposited in the hold of a big grey ship; it was a scene to hold the newcomer's attention and to make the time pass swiftly.

And across on the eastern bank of the broad river were peaceful-seeming, long, mud-thatched and palm-shaded huts, that one knew for hospital wards, because the Red Cross flag and the Union Jack flew together from a tall flagstaff in the midst of them. Beyond them stretched the desert, bounded only by an orange-and-mauve-lit haze on far horizons.

A smart young officer wearing the red collar-tabs of staff service stepped up and—with a certainty that I was the person he was looking for—said he had come to fetch me. That was nice. I fully expected, of course, to be fetched by somebody. I was to be the guest in Basra, he said, of the Inspector-General of Communications, and the Inspector-General's launch was at the wharf steps

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waiting to take me back down-river to headquarters. And back down-river in a launch meant skimming a swift way at water-level through the moving picture of interesting things afloat which I had already looked down upon from the high deck of the trooper as she steamed up the six miles of river-front to a new pier at its farthest end.

About ten miles below Basra there are three large ships sunk in what was at one time the channel of the Shatt-el-Arab. The masts and funnels of two of them and the prow of the other are high out of water at low tide—inviting one to mental picture-making of what lies beneath them submerged—and form nowadays one of the ‘sights’ to be seen.

They were sunk by the Turks during the earliest operations, with an idea of closing the river to the advancing British gunboats and troopships. But the Shatt-el-Arab is not a dependable stream for any such undertaking, and, being strong and deep, would cut for itself a sufficient channel against any imaginable obstacle. The British attached a cable to the ship in mid-stream, and, assisted by the current, pulled it round to one side. The river did the rest. Almost overnight it washed a wide curve in the eastern bank, and the new channel was established.

From that point on up to Basra the river becomes cumulatively interesting. An almost continuous procession of ocean-going ships passes and repasses, plying mostly to and from the port of Bombay : hospital ships, cargo ships, and camouflaged troopers, with now and then a too-busy-to-get-itself-cleaned-up refrigerator ship from Australia, with its dirty grey, rust-streaked hull covered all over with great splotches of red paint, as red paint is always laid on rust-eaten patches.

And ships nowadays have an almost human way of looking more in earnest about the thing they are up to than ships ever looked before.

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The young officer who had come to fetch me was A.D.C. to the I.G.C., and the launch lying at the wharf steps was a long, slim, red-carpeted, and soft-cushioned luxury that was proudly capable of making twenty-five miles an hour. It was driven exactly as an automobile is driven, and the man behind the wheel looked like a soldier chauffeur crouched to put a high-powered racer through the enemy's lines. He seemed to be in a hurry. I was not. But what with the noise of the engine and the wash of the high-foaming wake behind us, there was little chance of making myself heard, however much I might have wished to ask questions. Five miles or more we went, at top speed, and through traffic so congested that we escaped a dozen collisions only by what seemed to me to be as many miracles.

There were six or eight ocean-going hospital ships lying at wharves here and there, and many strange flat-bottomed, high-funnelled, and unshapely Red Cross river-boats were banked in before the long rows of hospital huts, their gangways thrown out across the Bund. These boats bring the wounded and the sick down the five hundred miles of river from Baghdad, and transfer them to the hospitals on shore, or to the ships for Karachi and Bombay.

Lying in mid-stream were a number of cruisers of the Persian Gulf fleet, while, hugging them close, or snuggling up against either bank to make room in the river, were a half-dozen monitors and some tiny gunboats, all bristling with guns that looked far too large for them. The monitors and gunboats are painted the colour of the desert dust, against which they are seen when they are on business bent up the Tigris or Euphrates.

There were troopships and cargo ships, smoke-belching dredgers, and many barges and tugs and double-decked steamboats. But mostly, it seemed to me, there were swift-scurrying launches—Red Cross launches, officers' launches, shining and trim,

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and common, grey-brown, and ill-kept workaday launches—all darting noisily here and there, making wide billowing wakes upon which slender, fragile-seeming belums teetered perilously, to be steadied by the strong paddle-strokes of deft Arab boatmen. The Arab boatman sits flat on his heels, high in the up-curving prow of his graceful small craft, and is a picture man with *kuffiyeh* wrapped under his usually shapely chin, and bound round his head with twisted strands of camel's hair.

Along the banks rose a forest of slender slanting masts on scores of mahaylas and dhows, that were high and dry in the mud of low tide. These curious vessels loom large in one's life in Mesopotamia, and are as much a part of the general scheme of things as are the palm-trees and the dust and the desert sands.

The belum is the sampan, or the used-for-everything canoe, of the country, while the mahayla and the dhow are great, massive-timbered cargo-boats, modelled on fantastic lines, that must have been familiar to the people of the days of Abraham.

I found the I.G.C. and the lines-of-communication staff housed in a rather pretentious, much-balconied, and many-windowed building on the Bund, which used to be the German consulate.

When the British occupied Basra, the German consul did not clear out with the Turks and make tracks for home, as one would imagine he might have done. He remained to be taken prisoner—knowing, perhaps, that he would be transferred to safe and comfortable quarters in India—and, as the British were advancing up the Shatt-el-Arab, he sent an appeal to them to make haste, that they might be in time to save the Europeans!

The Arabs were on a rampage, looting the town, and murdering the stragglers in the Turkish retreat—as is their custom—and it is supposed the German consul was frightened.

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Among the Europeans to be 'saved' were two British telegraph clerks from Fao, who had been in charge of the British telegraph station there and who were seized by the Turks the minute war was declared. They were routed out of their beds in the middle of the night, and marched straight away. They were not allowed even to dress or to gather up any of their belongings, and were forced to walk the full sixty-odd miles to Basra in their pyjamas and bedroom slippers, one of them even being without a hat. On the way Arab horsemen pointed rifles at them and threatened to kill them, while men, women, and children were encouraged to spit upon them as they passed through the villages and along the desert trails.

When they reached Basra they were thrown into the unspeakable Turkish jail, and for a week or more were mistreated in every possible way, getting nothing to eat but a few dates.

When the Turks started in full flight to the north—evidently in a curious state of disorganisation for the moment—they were released for some unexplained reason and were left in Basra. And for this the German consul wanted credit !

Very well. The British good-naturedly gave it to him and afforded him the most courteous assistance in his preparations for departure to the comfortable quarters in India. Then it was learned that he easily could have saved the young men from the frightful indignities and hardships to which they had been subjected, and that he was the instigator and financial backer of practically all the Arab outrages that were committed. In other words, he was a German consul.

In his one-time consulate there are a good many things which afford the present tenants considerable amusement. The furniture is of a splendid German heaviness and the decorations are of the 'new art' variety in light greens and sickly pinks.

But he did have some good Persian carpets which

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he had acquired during his residence in the Persian-carpet belt, and about these he is to this day greatly concerned. He could not take them with him to a detention camp in India, and as there was no place to store them in a town newly occupied by a victorious enemy, he had, perforce, to leave them on the floors. He knew they would be safe enough in the hands of British gentlemen, no doubt, but he now has the astonishing effrontery to write occasionally to the I.G.C. to express his anxiety about them and to ask that they be regularly beaten and aired !

And the curious thing is that the I.G.C. is only amused by the man's impudence and that he issues orders every once in a while to have the carpets attended to. In fact, he is so careful about them that his less meticulous young staff can hardly smoke in comfort in the mess-rooms.

Compare this with—a vision of German officers engaged in their favourite pastime of denuding and defiling the fine homes of Belgium and northern France ! Rather gratifying to Anglo-Saxon pride in Anglo-Saxon character, is it not ?

In the communications mess, besides the I.G.C. and his A.D.C. I found an assistant quartermaster-general, a deputy assistant quartermaster-general, and the Deputy with a capital 'D.' The I.G.C.—Major-General Sir George MacMunn—is a Knight Commander of the Bath, and has enough orders and decorations to fill three long ribbon bars on his chest and to make it impossible for any one to write his name with its full complement of alphabetical additaments on less than two lines.

The A.D.C. is a one-time prosperous barrister of Calcutta, who gave up a lucrative practice at the beginning of things and volunteered for any kind of service the medical classifiers might find him fitted for. They gave him the rank of first lieutenant and put him in charge of a mule-depot, and he got the attractive staff job as a reward for two years' uncongenial service uncomplainingly ren-

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dered. He has no ribbons at all, but he doesn't mind telling you that he has a younger brother in France with a Victoria Cross. The A.Q.M.G. is a serious-minded colonel who went on the water-wagon with King George for the unending 'duration' and the D.A.Q.M.G. is a major of cavalry in the Indian Army who has the French Cross of War and a record of thirteen years' service, nearly two of which have been spent without leave in Mesopotamia.

The Deputy—never spoken of as anything else—is D.I.G.C., understudy to the Inspector-General of Communications, who holds down the job at headquarters when the I.G.C. is off on his frequent trips of inspection up and down the lines of communication, which, starting from Basra, follow the courses of the Tigris and Euphrates and spread fanwise along dozens of avenues to the farthest outposts on the battle-lines. The Deputy, a big, white-haired, Irish brigadier-general, has brown eyes that smile and a tongue that keeps the community's sense of humour stirred up to bubbling-point.

And it was with the Deputy, off duty as an understudy, that I first explored the great city of war behind the palm belt and got a definite realisation of the fact that war can be waged constructively rather than destructively if the wagers thereof happen to belong to a nation with a modern Christian soul and a gentlemanly conscience.

Desolation, utter and complete and inexpressibly dreadful ! That is bound to be one's first impression of almost any part of Mesopotamia, and its curious charm does not impress itself upon one except at the day's end when it is flooded with seductive lights.

It was aflame with a fierce noonday glare when the Deputy and I rolled out into it in a big grey service motor car, though for a short time we rolled along over a fine hard-surfaced roadway that was

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black with oil. He had to tell me about that. It was the first road that had been built in Mesopotamia since the year before Adam. It is six miles long, and it cost more than any six miles of road ever cost before in the history of the world.

There is no stone in the country ; not even a pebble. In fact, there is no building material of any kind except mud, so everything that went to the construction of this road had to be brought up from the interior of India, and at a time, too, when sea transport was the most valuable thing in the world. But difficulty and expense were not to be considered, the road being an absolute necessity. During the early months of the year the earth is covered to an average depth of about seven inches with the thick, viscid mud I have already mentioned, which puts automobile transport out of business altogether and in which neither man nor beast can get a secure foothold.

The Turks did not believe the British would build roads. They never had themselves. And they relied with the utmost confidence during the winter of 1914-15 on the always hampering climatic conditions, believing that the British would be unable to establish an adequate base, to say nothing of making an advance. But the Britisher is just as good a fighter as the Turk, and happens to be a vastly more industrious, resourceful, and determined individual. He certainly did flounder round and get himself in a fearful condition that winter, but his first call was for labour reserves and crushed rock ; and first thing you know there was the six-mile road connecting all the points along the river where cargo is unloaded. In the meantime the river-bank was being rapidly lined with piers and warehouses.

This highway now connects everything else with the terminal of a railroad that was picked up somewhere in India where it was not absolutely needed, brought up the Persian Gulf, and laid down along the west bank of the Euphrates to supplement that

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uncertain river as a means of communication with the far-away north-western battle-front.

Long since, however, a reasonably inexpensive source of supply for road-surfacing material has been located and developed, and now the six-mile stretch is only a historic example to be talked about in connection with the difficult days. Road-building is now going on apace in every direction, as one is made to realise when one's automobile has to skirt round steam-rollers time and again, or plunge off into rutted side-tracks and run for miles on end through dust hub-deep to avoid long stretches of newly-laid crushed rock.

The Deputy, being more or less used to things as they are, tried his best to be communicative and friendly as we drove along through the immensities and mysteries—mysteries to me, at least—but the dust was so terrific that to open one's mouth was at times to risk being choked to death. Everything was covered with it, and to a thickness and heaviness that I can best indicate perhaps by reference to a boy I saw at a Red Cross depot clearing it off the sagging top of a big storage tent with a shovel. It had seeped into everything to such an extent that it was difficult, so far as colour was concerned, to tell where the camps left off and the desert began. Dust and tents ; dust and sheds ; dust and pyramids of war supplies ; dust and men ; dust and mules ; everything seemed blended together in an interminable stretch of yellow and tawny grey. It was desert camouflage.

Within the deep shade of the dust-powdered palm-gardens there are labour camps, mule depots, remount depots, veterinary hospitals, and accommodation for various native and auxiliary services. But beyond a sharp line, the palm-gardens leave off and the desert begins. And out in the desert the British Tommy and his Indian comrades have pitched their tents by the tens of thousands. Substantial huts of wood, with walls of reed mats and

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heavy roofs of mud, have taken the place of tents in one section, and these—grotesque to the last degree—stretch away in even rows across the plain like a measureless, fantastic kind of dream city, relieved by nothing but the round mud domes of many incinerators and an occasional flagstaff flying the colours of some regiment or corps.

There are Y.M.C.A. centres ever so often—these being mostly an American contribution to the general scheme of things—and there are frequent canteens, the canteen in the British sense being a small official retail store where Tommy can buy at cost price various luxuries, such as cakes, biscuits, chocolates, jams, potted meats, tinned fruits, and extra cigarettes, as well as many tempting small items of wearing apparel not included by government in his regular equipment. A place, in other words, where boy or man may relieve in himself, to a certain extent, a sometimes intolerable longing for home and the usual comforts. This kind of canteen service is a part of the regular British military organisation and is not related in any way to the canteen services provided by war-relief organisations and carried on by volunteer workers.

Then we went to the prison camp—in the same general desert area. There is a weird fascination about war prison camps. One sees cooped up in them, under the covering muzzles of machine-guns, thousands of men who have met one's own men in battle, have inflicted upon them inhuman horrors, and have themselves suffered unforgettable things, and one looks upon them with a vague kind of wonder. I have seen a great many German prisoners in France, and I can never control a feeling of resentment against them, but I felt rather sorry for the mild-eyed but otherwise villainous-looking Turks. There were only about three thousand of them in just then—with a few Germans among them—but the camp can accommodate seven thousand and has done so on a number of occasions.

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It is a tremendous square area enclosed in barbed-wire entanglements. The prisoners live in bell tents set in even rows which, running away and away in converging parallels, give one an impression of great distances. Outside every sixth or eighth tent I observed a group of men engaged in chopping up sides of beef. They were distributing a ration. It was fine, fresh Australian meat, and each man was getting a generous share of it.

I was thinking that coming upon a supply of such food must have been a welcome change for most of them. And, besides a good and sufficient meat ration, they get excellent white bread—exactly what the British soldier gets—and plenty of vegetables.

They are well fed and well taken care of in every way, the health of the camp being practically perfect; and there is nothing for them to complain of, really, except the climate. The tents are bleached white in the terrific sun, and throw back the savage glare of the fine dust as though in a kind of impotent rage; and that is rather awful!

But that kind of thing the British soldiers have to put up with, too, and they are less used to it, perhaps. Though, come to think of it, the Turks are as much foreigners in Mesopotamia as the British, and there are many of them from the hills and the regions up around the Black Sea to whom the desert is a torment and a torture. They are always delighted when they come to be transferred to camps in India, as all of them must be sooner or later to make room for the fresh relays coming in.

After leaving the camps of the city of war we struck straight out on the way to nowhere—toward which no way leads. There are desert roadways, to be sure, in one direction or another, but they are nothing but wheel tracks in the dust and sand and are not distinguishable very far ahead even at their best. In a sand-storm they become wholly obliterated in a few moments.

About five miles out in one direction there is a



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wide area of desert fenced in with barbed-wire entanglements, heavily stockaded and filled to capacity with munitions of war. It is a most comforting thing to look upon. It makes you double up your fists and say the first thing that comes into your mind which calls for an exclamation point by way of punctuation. And a little farther on we drove round a detached artillery encampment where several hundred new guns were being prepared for transportation on their own wheels to the far-away front. There were gun crews drilling, and in the vast silence one could hear the sharp commands of officers from long distances away.

We went on toward nowhere, intending to make a wide detour and come into old Basra by the Zobier Gate in the south wall. There was no dust out there ; only hard-packed sand, from which the fierce, hammering sun struck a myriad glinting, eye-searing sparks. But it was beautiful beyond words to describe. We spun along at fifty miles an hour with a cool, clean breeze in our faces.

Then, just over a slight rise in the sparkling plain, I saw my first mirage. It was impossible to believe it was a mirage and not really the beautiful lake that it seemed—a lake dotted with wooded islands and fringed in places with deep green forests. I have seen mirage in other deserts in other lands, but I have never seen anything like the Mesopotamian mirage. We drove straight on, and it came so close that I was sure I could see a ripple on its surface. Then suddenly it went away off, and where it had been our skid-proof tyres were humming on the hard-packed sand, and I saw that the wooded islands had been created out of nothing but patches of camel-thorn and that the trees of the forest were tufts of dry grass not more than six inches high.

Off on the far horizon a camel caravan was swinging slowly along and the camels looked like some kind of mammoth prehistoric beasts, while in

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another direction what we took to be camels turned out to be a string of diminutive donkeys under pack-saddles laden with bales of the desert grass roots which the Arabs use for fuel.

The mirage has played an interesting part in the Mesopotamian campaigns. In some places it is practically continuous the year round, and it adds greatly to the difficulties of an army in action. It is seldom mistaken for anything but what it is, but it does curious things to distances and to objects both animate and inanimate. Incidentally it renders the accurate adjustment of gun ranges almost, if not altogether, impossible.

One of the most curious incidents of the whole war happened in connection with a mirage, and on the very spot over which I drove that first day out in the desert. But I shall come to that presently.

We swung round a circle across the trackless waste and came up along the south wall of Basra to an ancient gateway. Seen from the outside, it is a picturesque old town with—what should one say?—the charm of Oriental unreality. It has flat mud roofs, high ornamental copings, round, low domes, and slender minarets. And the sun-yellows and golden browns of it tone with the tawny desert sands and are flecked here and there with glancing shadows from tall palm-trees.

I wondered how we dared to drive into the place in a big seven-passenger touring car, but the people had evidently learned how to get out of the way of automobiles, and they showed no resentment whatever when they had to flatten themselves for their lives against walls that our mud-guards barely cleared. In fact, they seemed to enjoy it, and they laughed and waved their hands at us. Sometimes there was not room for both them and the car in the same street, and they would have to run on ahead of us and seek safety in doorways or little open shops. But never mind. It was all very friendly.

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We drove into the narrow, dim bazaar, arched overhead and lighted only by slender streaks of sunlight which found a way into the darkness through clefts and crannies in the vaulting. Every town in Mesopotamia—and in Syria and Arabia and Persia and Turkey—has its bazaar. And they are all alike except that some are more dilapidated and more oppressive with dank and evil odours than others. A bazaar is always a street, or a network of streets—if such lanelike passages can be called streets—covered from the sun either with stone vaulting—sometimes very fine and sometimes not so fine—or with ragged reed mats or old bits of canvas or any unsightly thing that happens to be available. They are lined on either side with small cubicles in each of which some merchant displays his merchandise, while he sits on the floor, as a rule, with his legs tucked under him, leisurely pulling at the amber stem of the long tube of a hubble-bubble.

There is a certain fascination in the very word bazaar, and one expects to catch glimpses of tempting things that will make one's last dollar seem ripe for spending. But there are few places left in the world where treasures do not have to be diligently searched for. The world's collectors have been everywhere, and the people of the remotest places who own curious things have learned the Occidental value of them.

Not that one would ever expect to find anything in a town like Basra; yet it is a town now largely inhabited—on its outskirts, at least—by the kind of foreigners who buy tempting things, and at almost any kind of price. And a majority of the merchants are Jews and Persians who are not cut off from certain areas of supply.

A great many of the fine things that are sold in the Near East come from Persia, and, the war notwithstanding, there are no unusual restrictions on travel or business in Persia.

Nevertheless, one gets an impression that the

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whole Basra bazaar is draped in cheap ginghams and gaudy calicoes, while the only ‘objects of art’ to be seen are hideously tawdry Japanese articles that one knows were turned out in the same spirit of commercial conquest which at one time caused the ‘Made in Germany’ trade-mark to stand in the world’s mind for all that is mediocre and offensive.

Outside of the bazaar Basra is a town of small pictures and seems to be inhabited chiefly by a lot of delightful persons who exist for nothing but to pose round in attitudes of grace and subtle allurement. There is a winding creek, walled with masonry, spanned by arching footbridges and lined on either side with houses that are built of golden-yellow clay and have projecting balconies painted green and pink and brilliant blue. And, driving along the edge of this creek, one sees veiled women with long-necked, beautiful, brown water-jars, standing on moss-green steps under bending palms. Or a long, slender *belum* may glide swiftly by, filled with women wearing cerise and gold and bright purple *abahs*. Also there are always black-robed and ebony-faced slave women washing clothing at the water’s edge or playing with small companies of laughing, half-naked, adorable children.

Then, through a narrow street and round a corner, where a camel stands munching disdainfully in a queer angle of a crumbling ancient wall, you come into the city square, and up to the old *caravanserai*. I was interested in that because I had read in the private note-books a good many frankly blasphemous accounts of the early days when the *serai* was the only shelter the young British officer had in Mesopotamia.

The lawless Arabs had not then been cleared out of the population, and the peacefully inclined had not yet had demonstrated to them the advisability, not to say the tremendous advantage, of settling down under British law and order. There was hardly an Arab who did not possess a gun, and

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many of them had well-stocked arsenals, as the British discovered when they began a systematic search for arms.

It is said that the average Arab's highest ambition in life is to become the owner of a good rifle and one hundred rounds of ammunition. These are his equivalent for our 'vine and fig-tree,' or our ten acres and a team of mules. With a good rifle and one hundred rounds of ammunition he can go raiding, have a wonderful time, and make that kind of living for an indefinite period. Or he can join the 'army' of some desert chieftain, be taken care of, and have all the wild excitement his heart desires.

When the British entered Basra the town was being looted, and all the peaceful citizens were either in hiding or had placed themselves on the defensive. A proclamation was instantly posted, calling upon the people to preserve order and to observe certain rules laid down. It decreed that all looting must stop, and said that certain crimes—robbery under arms being among them—would be punished by established and well-known military methods.

But it happens that robbery under arms has been one of the principal Arab industries for ages, so it was not as easy as one might think to make a decree against it effective. There was one case of it after another; the troops were so busy elsewhere that an adequate patrol could not be provided, and conditions became intolerable. It was decided that something would have to be done about it, and this is what happened :

A robber was caught red-handed one night in the act of holding up two Arab dancing-girls who were on their way home with their earnings from a party at which they had performed, and the general officer commanding decided that instead of sending him for a long period to the jail that was already overcrowded, he would have him publicly flogged

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in the open square. He would make an example of him, and put the fear of the wrath of the British in the hearts of his brethren.

The square is surrounded on three sides by many-windowed buildings, and along the fourth stretches the low wall of the *caravanserai*, outside of which there is a coffee-house, or a trellis-covered open space filled with benches and wooden divans where the male population congregate every afternoon to gossip, to smoke their hubble-bubbles, and to drink innumerable small cups of coffee or innumerable small glasses of some kind of syrupy mixture.

The population was advised that the terrible exhibition was to take place, and the population gathered at the appointed hour in full force. Even the roofs were black with people, and the windows and balconies were jammed. A cordon of troops was drawn up round the flogging-board and machine-guns were trained on the square from roofs on either side—this to prevent any kind of demonstration or disorder—and when everything was in readiness the culprit was led forth and strapped into place.

Everybody ought to have been horrified. The British expected everybody to be horrified. But not at all! The girls who had been the victims of the robber, and on whose account he was about to undergo this most ignominious of all punishments, had brought a number of friends to see the show, and had disposed themselves comfortably in a long window which commanded a perfect view and in which they were the observed of all observers. They were all dressed up in their best *abahs* and veils, and were perched on a bench of some sort, giggling and having the time of their young lives. And a broad smile of pleasant anticipation illuminated the countenance of everybody present.

The British major who had charge of the proceedings told me about it, and said that he felt all the time as though he were standing on a vol-

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cano of mirth that was likely to explode at any moment. However, he and his troops were solemn enough. To them it was a ‘horrible example,’ and they hated it.

He gave the command for the floggers to proceed, the while, so he says, he gritted his teeth and cut the palms of his hands with his finger-nails in the intensity of his disgust with the thing he was compelled to do. But at that moment the bench on which the girls were squatting—that is what they do, they squat—gave way, and they all fell backward, some of them with their feet waving in the air, and the crash was the signal for a roar of laughter from all sides. The wretched creature strapped to the flogging-board—and with a stripe or two already laid across his back—raised his head and joined in with the utmost heartiness, while the floggers and the British soldiers, in their amusing efforts to keep their faces straight, added to the general fiasco.

After that what could serious-minded Englishmen do who were determined to see established a reign of law?

After that they decreed that hanging should be the punishment for robbery under arms, and the next scene in the public square was not so merry. There were two hangings, as a matter of fact, right there in full view of the whole population. Then robbery and thieving in the vicinity of Basra suddenly ceased. It was as though the Arab had said to the Englishman :

‘ Oh, well—if you are as serious as all that about it— ! ’

CHAPTER VIII

STRENGTHENING THE FOOTHOLD

If the British had been able to settle down at Basra and do nothing but guard from that mere foothold in the land the approaches to the Persian Gulf, the Mesopotamian story would have been a vastly different one. If they had been able to suspend military operations until some measure of preparation had been made to continue them, the Mesopotamian story would have been different. In either case it is not unlikely that the men in command of things would have been condemned for inaction.

They were condemned, anyhow, and rightly, perhaps. But it has to be admitted that up to a certain point their whole course of action was determined, not by any one's impetuosity or personal ambition, but by the actual necessities of the situation.

The Turkish army was divided into three sections, and after the British occupation of Basra one of these, under Subhi Bey—a former *Wali*, or military governor of the Basra district—took up a strong position at Qurnah, about forty-six miles to the north, where a branch of the Euphrates flows into the Tigris. Here Subhi Bey was in easy communication with Baghdad, and could be rapidly reinforced.

At the same time the main Turkish strength, under Suleiman Askeri, was in process of concentration and organisation on the Euphrates for a massed descent *via* the old stronghold of Shaiba, which lies about twelve miles north-west of Basra,

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and was held at that time by a mere handful of British troops.

The third section, amounting to eight battalions and some ten thousand well-armed Arabs, was concentrated on the Karun River, in Persia, threatening the Anglo-Persian oil-fields from that direction and seriously undermining the power of the loyal Sheikh of Muhammerah by disaffecting thousands of his tribesmen either through bribery or by religious misrepresentation. This being at a time when the Kaiser's 'holy war'—which puffed itself out with the foul breath of its own unholiness—seemed to have a chance of success.

So it happened that the Turks had something to say with regard to what the British should do. To establish security of position in the land the British were compelled to resume offensive operations, and at once, the object being to drive the enemy back on all sides to points as far removed as possible from the borders and coasts along which lay Britain's greatest danger. This necessitated a division of the British troops, and they were so far outnumbered by the enemy that the entire force was needed really to attack even one of the Turkish positions. However, no British fighting-men ever yet hesitated to take the short end of an uneven struggle.

The first thing to be done was to attend to Subhi Bey, and this they did forthwith. Mud and mid-winter miseries notwithstanding, it was exceedingly rapid action. Basra was occupied on the 23rd of November, and on the 9th of December Subhi Bey, forty-six miles away, was attacked and forced to surrender with four guns and more than one thousand men.

This was a splendid small victory, but the greater part of Subhi Bey's division retreated—or fled—and, being strongly reinforced, took up a position early in January about six miles north from Qurnah

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on the now tragically historic east bank of the Tigris. And there they were !

In the meantime the enemy on the Euphrates came down and achieved a surprise attack on the British at Shaiba, the ensuing battle being, up to that time, the severest and hardest-fought engagement in the Mesopotamian campaign. It was distinguished by a number of unique features, and culminated in the strange incident of the mirage to which I referred in the last chapter.

There is a great area to the westward of Basra that is enclosed with a flood-controlling embankment, known as the Shaiba Bund. And this area was then deeply flooded.

As I have said, the Turks delivered a surprise attack, and the shortest way for British reinforcements to reach the small company of men who were holding the old fortress was across this basin. Some of the troops marched across in water that in places was up to their armpits, while others commanded all the belums there were in the vicinity of Basra, and poled themselves across under heavy fire, fighting as they went.

The main struggle, however, was in the dry, open desert, and for a good many hours it was anybody's battle. It was going very badly for the British, and, though they were in overwhelmingly superior numbers, it was going very badly for the Turks as well. This the British officer commanding did not realise, and he was just on the point of giving an order for retirement—which probably would have been fatal to the British in Mesopotamia!—when, to his astonishment, he discovered that the enemy was in full retreat.

The British had no reserves. They were all in. But the Turkish commander, who really ought to have been more familiar with local phenomena, saw approaching from the south-east what looked to him like heavy British reinforcements, and he ordered an immediate retreat.

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Then his already unnerved troops stampeded, while his demoralised rear-guard was hounded and harassed all the way to Khamisseyeh, nearly ninety miles away, by great bands of nomad Arabs that had been hanging on the flanks of both armies, waiting to take spoils of whichever side should be vanquished.

The desert was shimmering with mirage, and what the Turkish commander mistook for a fresh British force was nothing but a supply and ambulance train that had made its way around the flooded area, and, being magnified and multiplied by the deceptive atmosphere, was coming up across the desert in a low-rolling cloud of its own dust. Suleiman Askeri learned the truth a few days later—and the British were told that he committed suicide.

And while all this was going on a third British force had to be despatched against the Turkish position in Persia. This operation was also successful, and by the end of May the enemy had been cleared out of Persia altogether. They were thrust back to the Tigris line, while General Townshend's army—the famous army of the siege of Kut—attacked the Turkish force on the east bank of the river and drove them northward beyond Amara, covering ninety miles in less than four days.

General Townshend occupied Amara—the principal town on the Tigris between Basra and Baghdad and one hundred and thirty miles by river from Basra—on the 3rd of June, and he was joined about two weeks later by the troops that had been operating in Persia and that had made their way across the difficult country—then under summer floods—all the way from Ahwaz.

And so began and developed the for-ever-to-be-remembered hot-season campaign of 1915, which was to end in such fearful disaster. At which point I shall leave for the time being the military operations, and in doing so I must take occasion to disavow what may seem to be an intention on my

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part to write a history of the war as it has been fought in the Mesopotamian zone.

I do not know how to write military history, and can only tell a few stories more or less as they were told to me, while I follow the British Army up the river that is specially interesting now because that army has made it so. Without a brief review of the operations it would not be possible to present any kind of picture of things as they have come to exist.

There is very little fighting during the hot season nowadays. It is as though the contending forces had entered into a sort of compact, the Turks having as little liking as the British for the murderous sun and the unbelievable temperatures. But during that first terrible summer they had to fight, and under conditions that would now be considered wholly intolerable.

CHAPTER IX

INTRODUCING THE 'POLITALS'

IT may be that the presence of the Political Commissioners in the Mesopotamia war zone imparts to the situation a certain air of mystery, but if so it is only because 'making a mystery' of things is one of humanity's chief delights.

The Political Commissioners contribute a considerable sum to the general scheme of things, and there is one located at every important point in the occupied territory.

But their title is an unfortunate one. It is not improbable that to the English mind it conveys exactly the right idea, but in the gradually developed American view the word 'political' has come to suggest something rather unpleasantly subtle—not to say underhanded and altogether reprehensible.

These men in Mesopotamia should be called Civil Commissioners, perhaps. They constitute a kind of balancing-bar between normality of government and actual military rule, and their duties are to see that the life of the people goes on in the usual way, to introduce necessary measures of reform in matters directly affecting the civil populations, to keep open a friendly communication between the Arab head men and the British military authorities, to collect taxes and to maintain, in so far as it is possible, the ordinary routine of governmental procedure.

It is a very useful service, and when the war is over and the troops are withdrawn it will have prepared the way for the easy and peaceable estab-

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lishment of civil government on a much higher plane of civic morality than the peoples of Mesopotamia have ever known anything about.

The men are all Deputy Political Commissioners as a matter of fact ; the one and only P.C. being Sir Percy Cox, who directs the work from General Headquarters at Baghdad. So throughout the land they are known as D.P.C.'s. There are A.D.P.C.'s also—even D.P.C.'s requiring assistants—and it was an A.D.P.C. that the D.P.C. of the Basra district took me one day to visit.

We invited to go with us a visiting Major-General from the Euphrates front and a very useful young gentleman to whom Arabic is all but a mother-tongue and who was in Basra fitting out for an expedition into the depths of the Arabian wilderness.

The D.P.C. and the visiting General and I took General MacMunn's somewhat rickety but always reliable Ford, while the visiting general's A.D.C. and the adventurer-into-waste-places took the D.P.C.'s big service car, and at an early hour we were on our way.

Basra or Zobier or both was or were the home port or ports of Sindbad the Sailor. Each of them claims this honour, but neither of them as it now exists was the city the Sailor knew. Basra was the great ancient city, and the ruins of it—a wide area of curiously mounded sand—lie seven miles or so to the south of the comparatively modern town of Basra, while Zobier is about five miles farther on, a walled town in the naked desert. It was to Zobier that we were going.

We drove through the dingy bazaar and a dozen winding, lanelike streets of Basra city and came out at the Zobier Gate in the south wall.

Basra city, incidentally, has something like thirty-three thousand inhabitants and is rich by virtue of its date-plantations, there being more than eleven million trees within the area it domi-

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nates. In ordinary times its export of dates equals its import of everything, and the plantations give employment to thousands of men and women.

The Zobier Gate is flanked on either side by two old round towers falling into ruin, while a short distance away stands a mediæval-looking fort with battlemented walls, high-arched portals, and square watch-towers rising from the corners of it. There are palm-trees behind it, and at its base is a deep hollow, like a great drained basin, in which hundreds of commissariat camels are quartered. With the camels are many Bedouins in graceful long *abahs* and with shaggy hair that falls from under bright-checked *kuffiyehs*. A picture of the East most Eastern !

Leading out across the desert from the gateway there is a track in the deep sands to which the Sheikh of Zobier likes to refer as one of his 'developments.' It is marked chiefly by the carcasses of dead camels and donkeys and by piles of bleaching bones, but here and there one comes upon evidences of scrapings and gutterings which indicate an intention on the part of somebody to make a road of it. And I was told that Sheikh Ibrahim, seeing British roadways under process of construction in and out and all round the district, decided that a proper highway between Basra and Zobier would be a valuable contribution to the general progress. Whereupon he got his tribesmen out one day, and they began work.

In places they managed to loosen the sand to such a depth that no automobile could possibly get through it, so we found it necessary to make frequent detours out across the unimproved plain.

The road leads directly through the mounded ruins of ancient Basra, in which archæological excavators have made great gashes, and out of which for a dozen centuries or more a large part of the building material has been taken for all the towns in the immediate vicinity.

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Perhaps the most interesting thing about Zobier is that it is built almost entirely of bricks from this buried city of the early world, and it is to the imperishableness of these bricks that it owes its appearance of excellent preservation and neatness. Most Arab towns are built of sun-baked mud slabs, and they soon fall into unsightly raggedness. But these bricks of Basra were moulded and burned when the world was so young that historical vision gropes along its then paths as an aged man might grope in his inner consciousness for glimpses of his earliest infancy, and they are everlasting.

Mr. Howell, the D.P.C., had notified Mr. McCullum, the A.D.P.C., that we were coming, and if Mr. McCullum had thought it possible that we might get lost in the labyrinthine puzzlement of his old town he probably would have been at the desert gate to meet us.

As it was, we drove boldly in. Then we stopped. Mr. Howell had been there only once before, and didn't know in the least how to find Mr. McCullum's house. But, having a command of the Arabic tongue, he could inquire. And any one would know where to find Mr. McCullum because he is the only white man in the place.

We stopped an ordinary, everyday, regular boy, and asked if he would show us the way. Yes, he would ; and, like any ordinary, everyday, regular boy he jumped on our running-board and took charge of the situation.

We learned afterwards that there was a perfectly simple route which we might have taken, through streets that are wide and straight. But the boy wanted to show himself off where the crowds congregate, so he guided us into the depths of the dim bazaar, where, having got started, we could do nothing but drive on with a hope that the way would open up. It didn't. A terrified population began to scatter before us, and we began to worry about the big car behind us. If it tried to follow



Camp of War Prisoners at Basra.



Labour camp at Basra.



Mule dépôt under the palms at Basra.

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us it would have to be pried out in parts and reassembled. Even our little Ford was soon wedged in between two shops where its mud-guards had scraped vegetables off the display stands on one side, and piece goods off a street-side counter on the other. The boy was scraped off the running-board, and fell all the way through the green-grocer's shop into his back garden. Which is a bit of an exaggeration to indicate the extreme shallowness of the shop and the narrowness of everything—including the boy's escape.

I wondered why the Arabs didn't get annoyed and unpleasant about it. But, no. They only moved themselves and their merchandise out of our devastating way and laughed with huge enjoyment.

It was no use trying to go on unless we were prepared to cut a way through by taking the fronts off all the buildings, and even a Ford would be hardly up to that. So we decided to walk, leaving the chauffeur to get himself out of his difficulties as best he could.

Incidentally, it was a mistake to worry about the big car. The Adventurer knew the way. He knew nearly everything.

As for the boy, he had greatly distinguished himself, and was for making the most of the memorable moment. Also, he was still seriously bent on showing us the way. He did it somewhat after the manner of a playful puppy.

We had come to the entrance to an arcaded footway, which wound round fascinating corners and seemed to be intending to get nowhere in particular, and naturally we could not rush through such a place, especially as it was insufferably hot in the sun, while under the high ancient-brick vaulting it was cool, with a soothing, shaded coolness.

But the boy thought we were in a hurry, I suppose. Most white people always are. He would run on ahead a short distance, turn round and look

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at us with a reproachful air, then hurry back to rejoin us. With considerable gesticulative indication of direction he would say something in clattering Arabic to the D.P.C., then rush on, only to repeat the process every time we stopped.

When we came out of the arcade we found ourselves in a wide, open plaza, where a sale of camels was in progress. There were hundreds of the odoriferous and extraordinary beasts lolling about in every conceivable camel attitude, while many Arabs in rich *abahs* and aristocratic-looking *kuffiyehs* went about among them, feeling their humps and examining their points with judicious solemnity.

And there were groups of African slave women here and there, sitting in the glare of the sun under the almost grim heaviness of the all-enveloping black robes they nearly always wear. As we passed by they covered their faces with their hands, palms out, to ward off the evil spell we were supposed to be able to cast upon them.

The A.D.P.C. is a young man who specialised in Arabic at Dublin University for no reason except that he was fascinated by Eastern lore. He had no thought of turning his specialty to uses that would be of value to his country—until the war began. Now he lives all alone at Zobier—sometimes not seeing a white man for weeks on end—and he makes use of his accomplishment in language and his love of Arabian life and institutions to the end that Sheikh Ibrahim and his numerous retainers maintain an active and friendly association with the British authorities.

When we reached Mr. McCullum's house we had plodded a long way in the hot glare through a street that was ankle-deep in fine sand and lined on either side by high walls that were utterly blank save for a narrow doorway here and there. But, once inside his courtyard, one could forget all that. One stepped into a scene of truly Eastern comfort.

The court was sanded and bare, but skirting

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one side of it was a deep verandah upheld by noble Moorish arches. There were splendid Persian carpets on the brick floor, while a small table under potted palms, surrounded by deep wicker chairs and bearing cool liquid refreshments, gave just the touch of West imposed upon East which the Westerner always manages to achieve in an Eastern environment.

Sheikh Ibrahim was there with our host to welcome us, and the first horrible thing we learned was that in our honour he had prepared at his palace a great feast. It was only ten o'clock in the morning. We had all breakfasted at the usual hour, and we were not ready for a feast. But it is part of the job of the Political Commissioners to keep the Arabs pleased with themselves, and I was assured that there is nothing an Arab likes better to do than to dispense lavish hospitality. And when it comes to eating, the time o' day means nothing to him.

Of course we would have to go, and we would have to eat any number of curiously prepared things, and do it with a pretence at least of whole-hearted enjoyment. Otherwise the noble Sheikh would be grieved, if not actually offended. We discussed the matter quite freely in his presence, while the A.D.P.C. translated the discussion for his benefit into something which seemed to please him, and at which he bowed and made deprecatory gestures. I gathered that he considered himself unworthy of our enthusiastic appreciation.

Sheikh Ibrahim is all that any one could wish a noble Arab to be. He is not a great chieftain like the Sheikhs of Kuweit and Muhammerah, but he is important. Moreover, he is an Arab of the desert, and not of the coast or the banks of the rivers, and he has the kind of fine, aristocratic face that distinguishes the 'people of the camel.'

I observed at once that his beard grew in the

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right division of tufts, and noted in detail his splendid gold-embroidered raiment. He was charmingly and completely Arab, and as he placed us with consummate dignity in the position of honoured guests I was humbled for a moment by the thought that in his environment it was we and not he who were 'different.' In which connection such men as he are blessed with a benevolent tolerance about which we know nothing at all.

He is a very rich man, having great date plantations, many herds of camels, and the right to levy tribute from a numerous tribe. He has always been friendly toward the British, but at the beginning of operations in Mesopotamia he had to 'trim' very carefully between them and the Turks, because he knew well enough that if he displayed any pro-British sentiment, and the Turks happened, even temporarily, to win, he would pay with his old neck, while his tribesmen would pay in other ways with their numerous lives.

His palace is just over the way from Mr. McCullum's house, and has but one opening on the street, a low-arched but rather beautiful doorway, which leads into a courtyard, and as I passed through that doorway I felt as though I were stepping out of the world that I know and into a region of such unrealities as fantastic dreams are made of.

On two sides of the court there were deep verandahs furnished with long divans thinly upholstered and covered with Persian carpets. And tied to short pegs driven in the sand were a dozen or more beautiful falcons wearing funny little brown hoods over their heads and eyes. They are blindfolded thus for some purpose connected with their training, but I don't know what it is. I was so busy seeing things that I forgot to ask. We were promised a hawking expedition in the desert after the feast, but we lingered too long, so I missed that.

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There were about fifty men in the courtyard, standing about in picturesque groups or sitting Turk-fashion on the divans, and each of them carried a rifle, and had a long knife thrust in his girdle. There were no women to be seen, of course, but I imagined there were a good many of them watching us from the high latticed windows.

The table was laid on an inner balcony overlooking a garden which bore evidence of an ambition on the part of somebody to adopt Western ideas. There were formal and regular flower-beds bordered with beer bottles, bottoms up, and the feebly growing plants were set in even, unhappy-looking rows. Only the palm-trees seemed to be at home, and they had a hovering kind of air as though they were trying to encourage the alien things struggling for life in the shade of their broad, beautiful leaves.

I wish I knew what we had to eat. The table groaned under the weight of a superabundance, and was the most extraordinary sight I ever saw.

There was roast lamb, for one thing. The Arab roasts a young lamb whole—literally—and lays it out in state at the head of the table. It is the *pièce de résistance* of every grand feed, and—horrible detail!—its eyes are regarded as the greatest delicacy, and are gouged out by the host and offered to guests of honour as ceremonial titbits. The A.D.P.C. had to explain to the Sheikh that I had signed the pledge on lambs' eyes for a month as an act of spiritual grace, and that the visiting Major-General never ate eyes on a Tuesday. Which was perfectly satisfactory so far as the Sheikh was concerned. If he should swear off on lambs' eyes he would resent having anybody urge them upon him.

Then there were great platters of rice. I thought I should eat some of that, but I found it was cooked in a curious kind of oil, and I simply couldn't do it. Neither could I eat the white stuff. It was

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served in ordinary soup-plates, and was a thick, sweetish paste. It was exceedingly like Hawaiian *poi*, but Hawaiian *poi* always makes me think of paper-hangers, bill-posters, and cockroaches.

There were many varieties of vegetables, but they were all done up in little individual packages, wrapped in boiled cabbage leaves and dipped in oil. And it was not olive-oil. I don't know what it was. In any case, I didn't like it, and I was afraid to force myself to eat it because it would have been too disgraceful to—disgrace myself!

There was plenty of plain boiled chicken and a little nest of hard-boiled eggs—peeled and dirty—at each plate. I peeled hard-boiled eggs and ate them diligently for an hour or more, thereby making a great show of enjoyment, and—I hope—satisfying my host. But it was an awful struggle.

There were no knives or forks or spoons or anything of that kind. Everybody ate everything—including the paste and the boiled rice—with his fingers, and the first thing I learned was that to eat with the left hand is very bad manners. Only the low-bred and uncultivated person ever touches food with the left hand. You eat with the fingers of the right hand only, and afterward the servants—or slaves—bring round brass basins and graceful ewers and pour water for you while you clean up. It amused me to find a piece of toilet soap of American manufacture on the edge of each of the basins, but goodness knows we needed it.

The British in their dealings with the brown peoples of the earth always conform to the customs of the brown peoples, so I was not surprised to find that our 'Politicals' were able to dispose of Arab food in Arab fashion, and with a deftness that no Arab could surpass. Moreover, they made no wry faces over it.

There was a Bedouin boy sitting opposite me who, I think, was the most beautiful human being I ever saw. He had long, lustrous, heavy black

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hair that hung in four braids down his shoulders from under a splendid *kuffiyeh*, that was bound round his head with ropes of silver brocade threaded with red. He was very tall, very slender, and his long black *abah* fell in billowing folds from his shoulders and trailed along the floor with a lordly grace.

His features were all but faultless—as clean-cut as a cameo—and his wonderful, long-lashed eyes were golden brown. He was as beautiful as a superb woman, yet he fairly radiated masculinity.

He was a rich retainer or henchman of the Sheikh, and he had come in from the far desert for a conference, and to deliver some desired information about conditions among the desert tribes.

When we had done as much justice as we could to the amazing banquet, we went out into the front courtyard to see the riflemen dance. They were a wicked-looking lot, and I could not help thinking how easy it would be for them to destroy us. If they had wished to do so it would have taken them about seven seconds. But they were friends of ours.

Their captain drew them up in a double column and barked some kind of command. Then to the accompaniment of a low-toned staccato chant he began a slow, flat-footed dance. They took up the weird song, and fell into the rhythmic motion. The chant grew gradually in volume and rapidity, as though gathering momentum for a mighty outburst, while the movement grew faster and faster. Then the outburst came!

It was the wildest thing I ever saw or heard, and within a few moments the men were whirling round the court like mad dervishes, waving their rifles over their heads and brandishing their knives like furies making for bitterly hated prey. It was a bit too thrilling to be altogether pleasant, but I was assured that on my account it was rather a tame performance. The men, for instance, were told

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not to fire their rifles, though the end of such a demonstration is always a fusillade in the air for the sake of the noise. I was quite satisfied.

The Sheikh is a real ruler of his people and is autocratic, being his own lawmaker, judge, and jury. Though, to be sure, he has a council and the laws of the tribes to interpret that are older than civilisation. Moreover, if he did not rule to the satisfaction of the ruled there would soon be an end of his power, but he enforces such regulations as are applicable to an unregulated people with admirable strictness, and he has no fear. He is a type. There are many like him.

A part of his palace is a prison. And such a prison ! It consists of a few windowless, brick-walled rooms, the heavy doors of which open on to an inner court, and are not even barred for the sake of light and air. He knows nothing about prison reform, that is certain.

He turned a great key in one of the locks and threw back the door, disclosing two malefactors sitting together, flat on the floor, in stocks ! A most astonishing sight ! The eyes of the poor creatures blinked at the light too suddenly let in upon them, and they looked very uncomfortable and rather foolish.

And the mediæval implements of torture ! They served to strengthen the impression I had that I had been permitted to step for a time away-way out of the twentieth century and back into another age.

All of which is merely by way of a brief journey off on a by-path for the sake of acquaintance with peoples and with certain unique and interesting features of British occupation of the ancient land.

On the way back to Basra we struck straight out across the desert towards the old fortress of Shaiba. We came up to the wide-curving trench-lines of the memorable battle of the Bund, and in the white heat of mid-afternoon we got out and tramped over

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the whole historic field. We went into the battered stronghold, now dismantled and empty, and reviewed the story of the great fight with much grim evidence of its fearfulness before us. A battle does not have to be fought by millions of men, you know, in order that it may have all the elements that go to make battles great historic events. The battle of Shaiba—known severally as the battle of the Bund and the battle of the Belums—fought away out on the Mesopotamian plain, was a great historic event.

Then we went to the cemetery, as sad a spot, I think, as there is on earth. It is so far away, so lonely, and so desolate. Yet there are a few feathery tamarisk-trees hanging over the graves, and it is ground in which, some day, grass can be made to grow.

I looked at the long rows of bare, dry mounds, and read many names of officers and men that are painted on the rough wooden crosses. And I thought less then of the sadness than of the splendid heroism of the deaths they all had died. The officers I was with knew most of the officers who fell at Shaiba, and to them the visit to the cemetery was something of a reverent pilgrimage. They stood beside the graves and talked reminiscently about first one and then another.

We were very quiet on the road home.

CHAPTER X

HOSPITALS AND THE NURSING SERVICE

IN the beginning, when conditions were such that the Mesopotamian campaign got itself listed among the always freely aired British ‘blunders,’ what probably outraged the sensibilities of the British public more than anything else—and rightly!—was the inadequacy of the hospital services.

The first expedition was undertaken with the idea, apparently, that there were to be no casualties anywhere except in the ranks of the enemy. Then events transpired with unexpected and unexampled rapidity, and the hospital services, being the last, it seems, to receive due consideration from the authorities at the sources of supply, did not keep pace in expansion with the constantly expanding scope of the operations. Therefore the hospital services got a black mark which almost tearful medicos will now assure you they never did deserve.

In any case, as soon as their inadequacy became a sufficient disgrace they began to get the occasional undivided attention of the authorities, with the consequence that they have developed to a point of excellence beyond which it would be difficult to go.

The first great tented hospital I saw was connected with the army camps in the extraordinary desert city of war behind Basra. But it must be remembered that I am writing after a rather long and varied experience in Mesopotamia, in the course of which everything has come to be connected in my mind with everything else, so I am able now to

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follow in memory a long series of such hospitals marking distances all the way up the avenues of communication to casualty clearing-stations behind the battle lines.

From the casualty clearing-stations the wounded are transferred by hospital boats or ambulance trains to stationary hospitals that are located at Baghdad and at points all the way down the river Tigris.

The ambulance trains are a new thing in Mesopotamia—the railways being new—and are among the things to be regarded as extraordinary. The Mesopotamian services have so few facilities and so few materials of construction at hand that when they achieve anything in the way of successful development it means more than the same kind of thing could possibly mean anywhere else.

Housed in the finest and largest buildings in all the towns there are stationary hospitals of tremendous capacity for British and Indian soldiers; officers' hospitals that in general attractiveness and completeness of equipment could hardly be improved upon; isolation hospitals and convalescent depots; and everything everywhere that could be regarded as requisite to the best possible care of the sick and the wounded. There are between forty and fifty thousand beds in the country now, and hospital expansion is kept constantly a few paces ahead of immediate demand.

An Assistant Director of Medical Service came to dinner one evening and invited me to go with him next morning down-river to Beit Na'amah, a particularly fine officers' hospital of which the local medicos—and this A.D.M.S. especially—are very proud. And with reason.

I had heard much about 'Baiten Amah'—as I spelled it in my own mind—and I wondered how it happened that I had missed seeing it on my way up-river. Though I know, of course. I miss any

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number of things as I go along, and all through an unfortunate habit I have of losing myself in contemplation of fascinating non-essentials. When we passed Beit Na'amah I very likely was leaning against the starboard rail gazing at the opposite bank of the river, and wondering at the fringy featheriness of the palm-trees and at the silvery shine of their broad dust-powdered leaves in the morning sunlight.

The word 'Beit' means house, and Na'amah is the name of the family that owns the great mansion which was turned by war's demand into a hospital, and which has since become famous throughout this part of the world.

Whether or not the Na'amah brothers were celebrated before the war I cannot say. They probably were on the Shatt-el-Arab, but if their name had ever gone overseas it was linked, no doubt, with shipments of dates, and not with any such association as it now bears in so many minds.

There are four Na'amah brothers, and, as they are very rich, their house is very fine. It was built to accommodate the entire family and all the family retainers, and it has an ample wing in which a harem of more than fifty women was maintained. The place was 'taken' by the British on their advance from Fao, because it was necessary then to sweep a clean path up to Basra. But, needless to say, the harem was not disturbed by the British soldiers, and this fact may account for the subsequent friendliness of the family.

It was recognised at once that the building was admirably adapted for hospital purposes, but it was four miles down-river from Basra, and very much farther by road across the desert and through the date gardens. And among the many things the British Army did not possess in those days was transportation. So during the first two years nothing was done with the place.

But came a time when General Maude was

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concentrating his forces in the north for the great drive which carried him to Baghdad and beyond, and since the situation had by that time developed to the ‘something ought to be done about it’ stage, things began to move. Without warning the Director of Medical Services suddenly issued a peremptory order that Beit Na’amah should be made ready within two weeks for occupation as an officers’ hospital. The A.D.M.S. who invited me to go with him on a trip of inspection happened to be the officer to whom this order was given, and as we slipped down the river that morning in the I.G.C.’s trim little launch—slowly, at my request—he was able to tell me in entertaining detail all about how he had obeyed it.

The building had no sanitary arrangements of any kind, and the only water available was in the river, whence it had to be brought by carriers. The only lights were oil-lamps, while the windows, being too small in any case to admit sufficient light and air, were all heavily barred. It was not only the house of the family of Na’amah, it was the stronghold as well, designed to keep out raiding Arabs and to keep a too numerous company of women under proper restraint.

Operations were complicated by the fact that the fifty-odd women of the harem obstinately refused to move out, so the work of establishing a hospital in one wing of the building had to proceed while they presumably looked on through the barred and heavily curtained windows of another.

There was considerable hospital equipment in Basra by that time, but it had been brought up by the ships and dumped on the banks of the river along with a thousand and one other things. No adequate system for handling materials had yet been established, everybody’s attention being concentrated upon the pressing and always increasing demands of the armies in action.

All of which, in a way, was to the advantage of

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the major medico in carrying out his impossible orders. Constituted authority being very much engaged elsewhere, he was able to eliminate red tape and to do as he liked.

He commandeered both labour and materials without asking leave of anybody. At once he put a small army of men to work cutting out windows, whitewashing walls, digging sewers, building a water-tank, laying pipe-lines, and putting in plumbing, installing engines, building and equipping an operating theatre, wiring the building for electricity, and putting in a dynamo—doing, in short, the thousand and one things needful, and doing them, literally, all at once.

He went to the supply dumps without detailed authority, and, finding what he wanted, took possession of it. He appropriated everything he required, from hypodermic needles to power-pumps and dynamos, and at the end of the allotted time he had provision made for one hundred sick or wounded British officers.

No wonder he is proud of the place. It really is very beautiful now, and since officers like it better than any other hospital in Mesopotamia, it has been crowded to capacity from the beginning, its capacity having been extended by this time to include the entire building. It is a long Arabian structure, with the usual flat roof and ornamental coping, and in front of it on the river-bank there is a narrow, quaint garden set with long, even rows of low orange-trees. That is one's first impression. But extending to the rear are three wings surrounding two great courts that are flag-paved and have railed balconies, and in the walls of which there are beautifully arched windows framing grilles of delicately carved wood.

In the harem wing the finest wards eventually were established, but it took a long time to get the women to move out. In fact, a bit of dastardly strategy was resorted to in the end, which, while it

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may have been shameful, had the desired effect of inducing their men to spirit them away.

The truth is that they were not supposed to be there at all. How should anybody know they were there? They were never seen. And since there were no nursing sisters in the hospital—only orderlies—the men felt privileged, perhaps, to relax somewhat their usually strict rules of propriety. Besides, they wanted that wing of the building.

So a 'swimmin'-hole' was staked off in the river, and a spring-board put in place directly under the front windows of the harem drawing-room. After which, at certain hours each day, a number of men were detailed to parade out in their birthday clothes and dive off for a swim. The women might have been able to endure this atrocity indefinitely, but it was known quite well that their men would not. And they didn't. There were rustling noises and much muffled talk at that end of the building one night, and next morning the harem wing stood empty. Whereupon the immediate and rapid establishment of the fine new hospital wards.

It is now a model institution, with everything looking much as though the place had been built for a hospital, and had been in existence as such for many years. True, there are a few Orientally gorgeous and gaudy walls left to remind one of what all the walls once looked like, and there are still worn mud-brick floors in some of the wards. Moreover, the fanciful ornamentation over the windows and the wide-arched passages leading from court to court, is of the East Eastern, while the dust-harbouring but beautiful carved-wood grilles are most unhospital-like. But scientific exactness and immaculateness are combined in the place with an Old World grace and allurement in a way which easily explains why officers all make bids to be sent there when they are ill or wounded.

Aching feet muscles are not among the things

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one is expected to mention when one has been permitted to enter a busy and forbidden zone of war, so I said nothing about mine when the I.G.C. invited me that afternoon to accompany him on a tour of inspection through the hospitals of Basra.

'Oh, very well,' said I to myself, 'I'll just make a hospital day of it,' and, thinking I might be needing one very soon, I was glad they had such good ones.

The hospitals are a part of the responsibility of the Inspector-General of Communications. I'm sure I don't know why. Except that 'lines of communication' seems to be an all-embracing title, and that everybody proceeds on the basis, when in doubt—the I.G.C.

I think I have forgotten to say that few of the 'finest and largest buildings' in Mesopotamia have been found adequate for war hospital purposes, and that in connection with nearly all hospitals for troops there are acres of hut wards, the 'huts'—each with a capacity of from fifty to one hundred beds—being long, narrow structures of imported uprights and crossbeams hung with reed-mat walls and topped with double roofs of heavy mud thatch designed to turn the fearful rays of the sun.

At Basra there was one dingy old building on the river-bank which used to be the up-river occasional residence of the Sheikh of Muhammerah. It was not very large, and in every way it was most unsuitable, but the Sheikh donated it as a nucleus for hospitals. At least that is what it became, and in a wholly made-over state it is now the administration building of British General Hospital No. 3.

There are between eight and ten thousand beds in Basra, so, in view of the fact that this old residence was the only available building, I need no powers of description to present a picture of the hospital area. Just as the camps of the soldiers



The ancient fortress at Zobier gate, Basra.



Scene in Ashar Creek of the Shatt-el-Arab at Basra.

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make a tented city in the desert, so the hospitals make a unique city of huts on the river-bank.

Attached to British General Hospital No. 3 there are a number of hut wards for prisoners, and these interested me particularly. They are identical with the wards for British soldiers except that they are guarded and enclosed in barbed-wire entanglements. Their capacity is seven hundred beds, and they have been full a number of times, the occasion being very infrequent when there are less than two or three hundred enemy patients to be taken care of.

The sick or wounded Turk gets exactly the same treatment the British soldier gets, and I am told that usually he is quite pathetically grateful and seldom hesitates to say that he is much better provided for than he could hope to be behind his own lines.

When the General and I finished our long tour of inspection we were joined by the D.A.Q.M.G.—otherwise the major—and we all went for tea to the Nurses' Club.

We were received by the supervisor-general of the nursing service, and if I were a nursing sister I suppose I should regard her as the most important person in all Mesopotamia. I think perhaps I do, anyhow. Her very dignified Christian name is Beatrice. Nobody would ever think of calling her Beatrice, of course. It would be an unimaginable liberty. But behind her back the sisters call her 'Trixie,' and talk with a whimsical kind of disrespect about her almost superhuman efficiency.

She makes all the rules and is not at all timid about exercising her rule-making prerogative. With the result, I would say, that in no war zone in the world is a girl in the uniform of a nursing sister more secure than she is in Mesopotamia.

Not to be able to accept an invitation to dinner at an officers' mess to which a number of girls are

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invited, and over which a high ranking officer is to preside ? That's rather severe ! Not to be able to so much as stroll with an officer down a dusty street in the open glare of noonday ? That's wholly unreasonable ! Or is it ?

I was only a smiling onlooker, and I loved them all—girls and men. I wondered, and I wonder. There were those who talked to me about rules that hurt the pride of full-grown women and make them feel as though they were in boarding-school or still in 'leading-strings.' But there is a good deal of peevish nonsense about that. They know that the strong and the staunch have to submit in all walks of life to regulations intended solely for the safeguarding of the—possibly weak.

And what interest would there be in the mere routine of life, anyhow, if there were no rules to break ? The wise supervisor-general decrees that two or more sisters together may do more or less as they please during their hours off duty. Then she expresses great surprise that so many of them get engaged !—and married ! In Mesopotamia ! It is all rather wonderful—and very nice. Rather a delicate subject, though ? Yes, but I don't mind touching upon it—just lightly.

The Nurses' Club was instituted and endowed by Lady Willingdon, and is in a quaint old baked-mud building on the Strand. There is a Piccadilly, too, as well as a Bond Street and a Pall Mall. The Britisher loves home so much that he takes home with him wherever he goes.

The Strand skirts Ashar Creek, the principal one of many small streams that flow into or out of the Shatt-el-Arab, and is a street I wish I were able to describe. Mostly I have driven along it with my eyes tight shut because of the blinding clouds of dust, but if only once I had seen its blank walls, its flat roofs, its raggedness, and its occasional projecting balconies and latticed windows, I should remember it in its entirety always.

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The Nurses' Club is done up in pretty curtains and cretonne-covered furniture, and it has quiet corners where sisters may read or write in secluded comfort; and so far so good. But the general idea of supervisors and such directing persons is that it is a place where the young women will be able to combine their forces for the endurance of the sometimes unavoidable presence of gentlemen, and where they can receive such undesirable persons in a sedate and proper manner. But it is not anticipated by those who are in a position to speak with authority on this point that the Club will ever serve this purpose to any alarming extent.

There are many palm-canopied creeks, you see, where orioles and kingfishers play from curtain to curtain of hanging vines in the sun-flecks of late afternoon. And these creeks are filled with belums that are poled or paddled by picturesque Arab boatmen—children of the fascinating land who are unable to understand a single word of an English conversation.

In a cretonne-upholstered corner of a stuffy club one might perhaps talk interestingly enough about Corporal Carmichael's wounds, or the best the Women's Branch of Bombay can do in the way of new books for its gift libraries. But in the mauve-lit silence of a placid, high-banked creek . . .

But why be light-minded, altogether? Only because I met them light-mindedly after I had met them—so many of them—on their endless rounds of splendid duty in the wards of the hospitals. One wants to relax with them and for them.

They really are an amazing sisterhood. In the beginning it was thought there could be no nursing sisters in Mesopotamia because the conditions were such as no Englishman would ever ask a woman to endure. But the women had something to say about that, and eventually they began to arrive, small units now and then. And at once they

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began to demonstrate their astonishing powers of physical and spiritual resistance.

Men by the hundreds get bowled over by the sun, or die of heat-stroke ; the nursing sister miraculously escapes this greatest of all the dangers. Men by the hundreds are incapacitated by sand-fly fever and other maladies peculiar to the climate and environment ; the nursing sister seldom gives up to anything. Men, suffering in a temperature of one hundred and ten, twenty, thirty degrees, tortured by insect pests, overworked, unable to sleep, get low in their minds—hopelessly dejected ; the nursing sister is always cheerful, and manages in some mysterious way to keep fit and to look fit under any and all circumstances.

Yet she works just as hard as any man and has had no special provision made for her general comfort and well-being. Work ? Well, there are between forty and fifty thousand beds in Mesopotamia, and less than six hundred nursing sisters all told. It makes a nice little problem in calculation, even though you do count the nursing sister out of all the evacuation hospitals.

The General and the Major and I said our good-byes all round, made our variously halting and interrupted ways among the sisters and down the steep, ancient, mud-brick stairway, and climbed into our big motor car with sighs of relief and contentment.

The General gave the soldier chauffeur some orders—I did not notice what they were—and soon we were spinning out over the hard-packed sand of the desert in the orange light of a marvellous sunset.

Gods of the ancient peoples ! No wonder they were gods of the sun—of vivid and appealing but ungraspable things ! One's heart lifts and sings its song of the open world !

We swung round the big circle marked by wheel

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tracks, and came up past the old fort where the camels are, and thence to the Zobier Gate, flanked by the crumbling towers that stand like aged sentinels at the desert's edge. We thought it would be a good idea to stop there and climb to the top of one of them, where there is an old cannon lying deep in the dust, like a crouching blind war dog with its muzzle nosing the rampart. The General wanted to show me the arms and monogram of King George III. of England that are engraved upon it !

'Very likely,' said he, 'it has been in Boston Harbour in its day.'

He was never able to forget that I was an American, and was always endeavouring to be polite about it.

But how did a British cannon of American Revolutionary days ever get on that old Mesopotamian tower ? It reminded the General of the well-worn story about the Englishman who was showing an American girl through St. George's Chapel—or some such place—and who pointed out a certain tattered battle-flag with the remark :

'We took that away from Bunker Hill.'

'Oh, is that so ?' said the girl. 'But—— I suppose you haven't forgotten that we still have the hill ?'

The General liked that story, and he chuckled about it quietly—rather musingly—while the Major sat away out on the muzzle of the old gun and—with his thoughts far away, no doubt—hummed a Honolulu melody to the slowly dying lights in the desert.

CHAPTER XI

GENERAL TOWNSHEND'S ADVANCE

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR STANLEY MAUDE, commander-in-chief of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, had been occupying a position of first importance in my personal scheme of things for a good many weeks, and while I knew I never could have landed in Mesopotamia at all without his consent, it had been so thoroughly impressed upon my mind that he was rigidly opposed to admitting to the zone of his military operations any one not directly connected with the services of war, that I had some doubts with regard to the quality of the welcome he might be expected to extend to me.

But the day I arrived at Basra he greeted me with a telegram which served to dispel all my misgivings, and by the first boat down from Baghdad he sent me a letter.

I need not hesitate to say that I stood in awe of him, and that there was very little doubt in my mind that he had consented to my visit, in the first place, with considerable reluctance. But I was to learn afterwards that he never did anything reluctantly. Indecision and half-way measures were impossible to him, and he never could have sanctioned anything in a spirit of compromise. He wrote to me :

I am afraid you will find things a little bit rough out here, but I have asked General MacMunn to make you as comfortable as possible. You will find him a perfect host, and I am sure he will do everything for you that is reasonably possible under existing conditions. He will be able to

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advise you as to your tour in Mesopotamia, as he knows the ins and outs of things perfectly. So will you just say what you want to see, and he will be able to suggest the best way for giving effect to your wishes.

I shall be very glad to see you whenever it is convenient for you to come, and to put you in the way of seeing what there is to be seen. I hope, too, that you will come and stay with me at Baghdad. You will not, I am sure, expect too much, and all I can say is that we will make you as comfortable as we can. I hope your visit will be one of great interest, for this is indeed a wonderful campaign, and, with its peculiarities and difficulties, a much bigger thing than most people imagine.

A much bigger thing than most people imagine ! I began to realise that immediately !

'*When Maude went north*' is a phrase they use now. It runs like a thread of something different through the usual grey fabric of local conversation about events of former days, and it lifts the hearts of the men who have been through it all ; the men —so many of them still in the Mesopotamian zone —who went through the first onrushing advance ; through the ill-advised original attempt upon Baghdad ; through the subsequent retreat and the long siege of Kut-el-Amara ; through the hell and the slaughter of the repeated endeavours to relieve General Townshend's beleaguered army ; through the humiliation and heartbreak of defeat and surrender ; through the test and the trial and the torture. How different it all became '*when Maude went north*' !

The operations having landed General Townshend in Amara, one hundred and thirty-two miles by river from Basra, the Turks proceeded to take up a strong position at Kut-el-Amara, one hundred and fifty miles farther on, where they commanded the easiest and most direct routes into Persia. And it was recognised at once that in order to fore-stall a possible movement of the enemy back into

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Persian territory Kut-el-Amara would have to be taken.

Amara was occupied on the 3rd of June 1915—I must repeat dates occasionally, if you don't mind—and there General Townshend halted long enough to enable such communication services as then existed to establish a base of operations. This involved bringing reserve supplies of food, forage, and munitions up-river, and getting ready to meet an inevitable demand for rather extensive hospital facilities.

I am writing about General Townshend as though he were in command of the operations. He was not. But to follow the comings and goings of a succession of commanders-in-chief would be to complicate a story which I wish to make quite simple and direct. Sir John Nixon was in supreme command when the advance on Kut was made. He was succeeded by Sir Percy Lake, who in his turn was succeeded by Sir Stanley Maude.

And while General Townshend—a division commander only—was reorganising his forces at Amara, the Commander-in-Chief was directing operations on the Euphrates, where a second British army was pushing north in the fearfulness of midsummer heat, through midsummer floods, and against a more stubborn and sustained resistance on the part of the enemy than any Turkish force had previously displayed.

The 'peculiarities and difficulties' of the Mesopotamian campaigns have been indeed unique, and one wonders now that men have overcome them. In retrospect it is too glaringly apparent that tremendous and inexplicable mistakes were made in calculating material requirements, but, as I have said, necessity urged, and the only instance in those days when unwise counsel prevailed was when it was decided to drive on to a spectacular finish an already splendid victory—before adequate preparation had been made for a farther advance.

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This was after General Townshend had occupied Kut-el-Amara.

The original occupation of Kut was a curiously British performance. It was accomplished really by a handful of men who were annoyed with the enemy. It was the evening of September 28, 1915. The British force had advanced up the river from Amara, and had met the Turks in a concentrated engagement below Kut, the Turkish force consisting of three divisions and a mounted brigade under Nur-ud-Din. As night began to close down the action thinned to sporadic shelling from both sides, and a single British column that had been fighting all day in the desert without water started to make its way toward the river, only to find itself in a short time marching parallel with a large force of Turkish infantry. The situation threatened to develop into a tight corner for the British, and that was when they became annoyed.

Having fixed bayonets, they wheeled to an order of 'Right turn!' and marched straight toward the enemy. The two columns were less than a mile apart, and the British were without so much as a sandhill or tuft of desert grass for shelter.

The Turks took cover in a dry, deep water-cut that lay on their line of march, and opened a devastating fire which swept the British ranks in their deliberate advance with fearful effect.

Then came the swift, terrific attack, and the British line plunged forward. It was too much for the Turks. Like the Germans, they abhor the gleam of cold steel. They broke cover and fled in the utmost confusion, leaving behind them numbers of guns and much else in the way of valuable impedimenta. And this precipitated a movement of retreat throughout the Turkish ranks which very quickly developed into a veritable stampede.

And so it was that Kut was occupied. A detachment marched into the town next morning—

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September 29th—while the main British force pursued the fleeing Turks to the northward.

From Kut to Baghdad it is two hundred and twelve miles by river, and only one hundred and twelve miles by the land route. This fact is a sufficient commentary on the extreme crookedness of the Tigris, and I might add that above Kut some of the worst shallows are encountered. There are stretches here and there that are all but unnavigable when the water is low, and the water is at its lowest just before the rains begin in late November or early December. And be it remembered that the river was the only avenue of communication with his bases of supply and hospital services that General Townshend had.

In cold official statements it is recorded that General Townshend ‘pursued the routed Turks with the utmost vigour,’ but he was a fightin’-man and, considering the fact that ‘an army travels on its belly,’ one is justified perhaps in surmising that he was carried forward by the impetus of victory farther than he intended to go. Or was Aziziyeh the first possible place where a halt could be called ? It is such a terrible desert land !

In any case no stop was made until the army reached Aziziyeh, sixty-one miles by the land route from Kut, and one hundred and two miles by river. Half-way from Kut to Baghdad !

The Turks meanwhile continued their retreat to a previously prepared position at Ctesiphon, forty-two miles farther on.

Then came the fatal decision. General Townshend is on record as having been opposed to an immediate advance with Baghdad as the objective. He recognised the inadequacy of his communications, but having halted at Aziziyeh for six weeks while newly captured Kut was provisioned and equipped as a base of operations, he moved on—in obedience to the order of the army commander !

The operations were being directed as a matter of

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fact by a General Staff located on the Olympian and luxuriously comfortable heights of Simla. But the confidence of the General Staff was in a measure justified. The British in Mesopotamia had been so consistently successful that nothing seemed impossible for them to do. They themselves were in exuberant spirits, thrilling to the blare of their own trumpets of victory, and treating with magnificent disregard every suggestion of caution.

General Townshend proceeded to carry out the orders he had received, and on the 22nd of November he attacked the enemy position at Ctesiphon. What does not seem to be very generally known is that he achieved a brilliant victory.

He captured the first Turkish line almost at once, taking thirteen hundred prisoners and eight guns ; then he stormed the second line and thrust the Turks back to their last defence. The action is described as having been magnificent, and he could have driven straight through if he had had behind him anything at all in the way of reserves or communications. He had nothing, and there was no way on earth for him to make victory finally victorious.

On the 23rd—the first anniversary of the occupation of Basra—the enemy was reinforced from Baghdad and the north in tremendous numbers, and the tide was turned.

But even against overwhelming odds the British fought on with the utmost valour and tenacity, and it was not until he discovered that the enemy was executing a wide flank movement, with every prospect of cutting him off, that General Townshend decided to retire on Kut.

Then the fearful retreat began—on the 25th of November. It is difficult even on the spot to visualise the horrors of such a retreat in such a land. Eight days it took, with a rear-guard hammered and harassed every foot of the way by an enemy that had suffered long-drawn-out defeat,

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and was now fighting with an assurance of victory and a heartening knowledge of his vastly superior strength.

There is a story about the medical and communications officers who were waiting in Kut for orders to move on up to Baghdad. They had absolute confidence that Townshend would win, and several of them were sitting round a table in a mess-room one day talking about how they would spend Christmas in Baghdad, when suddenly they heard the sound of far-away guns.

‘My God ! what’s that ?’

They had not heard even a rumour that a retreat was in progress until the retreat was almost upon them. Then the worn-out, heartbroken, bedraggled, unrecognisable remnant of the wonderful little army began to straggle into the town.

Kut-el-Amara was invested by the enemy on the 7th of December and the long siege began.

And General Townshend, with nothing in Kut but the meagre stock of provisions that had been brought up as advanced base supplies, held out against the constant hammering of the Turkish army which surrounded him for one hundred and forty-three days ! During which time one British division after another, as each arrived in Mesopotamia, was sent in, singly and practically unsupported, to hurl itself to destruction in vain attempts to relieve him.

The siege of Kut was a mere incident, perhaps, in the great world struggle, but it was spectacularly tragic, while the besieged in their tenacity and endurance displayed a heroism that could not possibly be surpassed. It was the utmost.

On the 29th of April 1916, General Townshend capitulated—not to the enemy, but to starvation. And the whole valiant army went into captivity, having won the profound respect even of its captors.

CHAPTER XII

LINES OF COMMUNICATION

ONE Colonel Chesney, a great-uncle of the Inspector-General of Communications, led the expedition which placed the first steamboat on the river Tigris.

He started in 1835. From first to last it took him a good many weary months—two years, in fact—and the record of his historic achievement reads like the fevered kind of fiction that is written not to convince, but only to thrill and to convey one in dreams to far-away and unimaginable regions.

The expedition started from England with two boats, which, being landed near Antioch on the Orontes, were transported in parts across the desert to the upper waters of the Euphrates, where they were set up and launched. Only one of them succeeded in finishing the trip down to the Persian Gulf, after which it started up the Tigris toward Baghdad.

No Arab of those days had ever seen any kind of steam-run miracle of machinery, and to many of them the new craft was a thing to fear and sometimes to propitiate with prayers and offerings.

But, even so, they were not so very far behind the times. This first modern navigator of the Tigris was born along about the time the steamboat was invented ; and one remembers that on the occasion of the *Clermont's* first trip up the Hudson the wholly Christian crews of other Hudson River boats ‘in some instances sank beneath the decks from the terrible sight, or left their vessels to go ashore,

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while others prostrated themselves and besought Providence to protect them from the approach of the horrible monster which was marching on the tides and lighting its path by the fires it vomited.' This being from a contemporary review, quoted in a biography of Robert Fulton.

Organised resistance against the intrusion of such a monster in peaceful Arab lands was inevitable, and the old British pioneer, with his associates, played a merry game with constant and fearful danger, with extraordinary hardship, and with heartbreaking delays in his then unprecedented venture.

But no doubt he had wonderful visions to encourage him and keep him going—visions of the rapid development of a great business undertaking which should bring to early realisation the even then much-talked-of tapping of rich regions as yet untapped by the unfolders and expanders of world commerce. He did not live to reap the fruits of his intrepidity and enterprise, but perhaps his gallant and courageous spirit stalks to-day up and down the ancient river and along the banks of the Shatt-el-Arab in company with his so typically British great-nephew, to whom, curiously enough, it has been given to bring his visions to spectacular materialisation. If so, his spirit should be satisfied.

With him on the expedition was one Lieutenant Lynch, who settled in Baghdad as a trader and was joined there by his two brothers. These men started the Lynch Company, and secured from the Turkish government a concession which gave them exclusive rights to steam navigation on the Mesopotamian waterways—the Tigris and Euphrates and Shatt-el-Arab.

This is ancient history, but the Lynch Company is modernly interesting. They were conservative men who operated conservatively always, but the greatest 'boomers' alive would have difficulty in finding anything to 'boom' on the Tigris and

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Euphrates. There were large shipments of native products—dates, liquorice, a few grains, Persian treasures in carpets and fanciful things—to be brought down-river at certain seasons for the ocean-going ships at Basra; a few modern things had to be taken in to the populations along the river-banks, and there was an occasional traveller to be carried up or down. But there was never anything to necessitate the establishment of a river service that was other than leisurely and intermittent. So before the war the only steam-craft on the river Tigris were the old boats of this company that for years had been plying in a stolid kind of way between Basra and Baghdad.

I really don't know how many there were—two or three, perhaps—but naturally anything that could be of use to the Turks on their hurried retreat was commandeered, and the British found the conquered waterways empty of everything save a few snail-paced dhows and mayhalas, and a sufficient number of the canoe-like belums which are owned by individual Arabs for the most part, and are not of much use, anyhow. Though they have played their interesting and sometimes spectacular part in the Mesopotamian battles.

From the gulf up to about twenty miles north of Basra the Shatt-el-Arab is deep enough to admit ocean-going steamships, but above that point the shallows begin, and the Tigris is navigable for nothing that draws more than three or four feet of water.

What, then, was to be done for river-boats when the Expeditionary Force, pursuing the Turks to the northward, got so many miles away? The operations, which carried the army on and on, proceeded with a rapidity which could do no less than greatly strain even a fairly adequate transport service. What it did to a transport service that was practically *nil* is better left to individual conjecture.

It was only ten months after the first landing

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was made by British troops that General Townshend occupied Kut-el-Amara, two hundred and eighty-five miles from Basra, and by that time—thanks to the contributions of a few near-by ports and river towns—the available river shipping amounted to something like six steamboats of sorts, a few barges, and an established chain of mahaylas and dhows. And when, some six weeks later, General Townshend began his fatal advance toward Baghdad, the inadequacy of his communications, in comparison with present conditions, was all but criminal and wholly unbelievable. For instance, he was provided with hospital transport for not more than five hundred wounded ; at Ctesiphon he was one hundred and eighty-two miles by river from his hospital base at Kut, and in two days' fighting he had four thousand five hundred casualties.

Moreover, at that time, with every ounce of material of every kind being brought in from overseas and unloaded at Basra, where the building of piers and warehouses was only just beginning, the supply and transport service was taking care not only of General Townshend's army, but of the force as well that had advanced one hundred and forty miles up the Euphrates.

Those were difficult days, but I think I must pass them by ; pass by all the worry and the toil of them, and, incidentally, the disgrace which eventually overwhelmed the men who were held responsible for the terrible tragedy of them, and come to the time when General Maude went north. By that time the British had paid in full for pressing their luck and for under-estimating the strength of their enemy, and had settled down to the grim business of exacting payment in return.

It was a little more than seven months after General Townshend surrendered at Kut when General Maude launched the victorious campaign which landed him in Baghdad, and when he started

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he had behind him lines of communication fully organised, with more than one thousand steam-vessels and power-boats of various kinds plying up and down the river Tigris. What a difference! And what an achievement!

There are more than sixteen hundred bottoms now, and naturally the first question the interested visitor asks is :

‘How on earth did you do it?’

I was standing on an upper balcony of the Lines of Communication headquarters, talking with General MacMunn, when I asked him this, and he ran his eyes up and down the rushing, bustling six-mile length of Basra’s now well-built river front, and smiled a twisted smile that had in it whole volumes of unpleasant reminiscence.

‘We did it!’ he answered grimly. Then he pointed out a Thames penny steamer bearing proudly down the middle aisle of the crowded stream with two big barges lashed to her sides. ‘We did it!’ he repeated.

‘But the Thames penny steamer! How did she get into the Shatt-el-Arab?’ I exclaimed.

‘*Under her own steam!*’ he answered. And that is the whole unimaginable story.

Remember there were no railways and no roads; only a trackless waste rolling away to the north that was deep in dust in the dry seasons, and during the rains was in great stretches a hideous and dangerous quagmire.

River-boats were an absolute, a primary necessity. They could not be built in Mesopotamia, nor anywhere else in time to relieve the desperate situation. They could not be materialised by the wave of any magician’s wand. Well, what then?

Then they would have to come out of other rivers otherwheres and make their various ways somehow —no matter how!—across the seas and up through the Persian Gulf! They were requisitioned from the Ganges and the Indus and the Irawadi, from

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the Nile and the rivers of Africa ; from everywhere they have come. It has been one of the bravest and strangest achievements of the war, and one hears with a feeling of specially chill regret that more than eighty of them have failed ! A few from everywhere have gone—along with the high hopes of British sailors, and usually with the sailors, too—to the bottom of the seas they were never meant to venture on.

But the Thames penny steamers ? Where is it you go on the Thames penny steamers ? To Richmond ? To Putney ? To Henley ? To queer little landings here and there round London where crowds of people gather on gala days, and where happy summer memories are made ? Yes, to places like that. There is a holiday sound in the very name —Thames penny steamer. They may be used for purely workaday purposes ; I do not know ; I only know I went to Richmond once on a Thames penny steamer.

But the Thames penny steamers, too, were needed on the Tigris.

So bravely they set out. Eleven of them started, but only five of them achieved the impossible. Five of them got to the Tigris, and are now listed by number in the great fleet under a class initial.

As I watched the curious, flat-bottomed, high-funnelled, double-decked, paddle-wheeled little craft churning briskly down-stream with her two clumsy barges in tow, I was seeing visions of the kind of heroism that makes one prayerful.

I saw first the matter-of-fact, nonchalant British sailors on her frail decks preparing for such a voyage as was never before undertaken. Then I saw her, her sides boarded up and her one-time spick-and-spanness begrimed with the coal that had to be stowed in every possible space, moving out of the snug security of the busy, bustling, city-bounded Thames into the open, high-rolling Atlantic. I followed her course across the perilous Bay of

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Biscay and saw her creep down the long coasts of Portugal and Spain and through the straits past Gibraltar.

After Gibraltar would come ~~a~~, a hopeful, careful, long, long crawl across the mine-strewn and submarine-infested Mediterranean. Port Said in safety! Then the Suez Canal—contributing a brief period of relaxation—the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and finally—with what a sigh of relief! —the broad current of the Shatt-el-Arab and the almost rippleless serenity of the blessed Tigris !

I don't know what happened to the six that failed, but one hears that 'their backs were broken by the high seas.' That was the chief danger they all had to face ; they and the hundreds of others from other far-away rivers, too. More than eighty of the others went down, and six of the Thames boats ! They should be honourably counted among England's honourable losses at sea, and they never have been. Nobody has ever paid any attention really to the wonderful Mesopotamian story.

Then there are the barges. There are a good many more barges than steamboats on the Mesopotamian waterways. They represent the spirit of economy in the transport service, and everything under its own steam, or under power of any kind—including dozens of the grimest tugs that ever spilled oil on clean waters and filled the atmosphere with unpleasing odours—has one or more of them in tow. Latterly a good many of them have been brought from overseas in parts and set up in the new dockyard on the river-bank at Basra—which might have been a German dockyard turning out U-boats for the Eastern seas but for one fine victory that is England's—but in the beginning numbers of them made their own way across the wide waters, or were towed over by some of the same tugboats that are towing them now round about in the placidity of unruffled rivers. I declare it is a story one cannot believe ! It is just that

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there is nothing men will not attempt and cannot do.

Heaven and the secretive authorities only know how many barges have been lost, but there is one story I have which throws considerable light on the performance as a whole, and which serves rather graphically to illustrate some of the difficulties men may expect to encounter who go down to the sea on river barges.

One Corporal James Harte, of the naval engineers, left Aden on the 21st of May 1917, in charge of a refrigerator-barge that was in tow of the tug *Harold* for a voyage across the Arabian Sea. On the fourth day out from Aden Corporal Harte wrote down in his log a brief statement to the effect that at eight o'clock in the evening a stiff breeze sprang up from the south-west. This would mean that the seas began to roll high and to break in chopping white-caps which must have looked menacing enough to men on such a vessel. But as a recorder of events the corporal seems to have been strangely imperturbable, as his next entry in the log, dated the following day, proves :

About 3.30 A.M. got adrift from tug. The last we saw of tug she was astern of us to leeward. She sounded her hooter a succession of long blasts—for about two minutes. When the hooter stopped she had disappeared.

Was ghastly tragedy *ever* written in briefer form than that ?

The high wind kept up ; on the 27th there was a heavy sea running and the barge had drifted out of sight of land. Then Corporal Harte and his men rigged a jury-mast and a square sail and prepared to navigate on their own. The log continues :

May 28.—At daybreak sighted land to leeward about two miles distant. Blowing too hard to hoist our sail. When about a mile from the land our towing-gear got foul on the bottom and hung us up. By this time the gale had nearly blown itself out and had shifted so that we swung clear of

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the land. About 10.30 P.M. our towing-gear came away and we drifted clear.

May 29.—Sighted land again to leeward. Hove up, slipped our towing-gear and hoisted sail, but could not get the barge to fall away. Bent 3-inch manila to stern anchor and dropped it, and when the sail filled and the barge swung I cut the hawser and got clear. The wind was W.S.W., and the land ran out to the eastward. We just managed to round the point and went away to the N.E.

It was north-east that Corporal Harte wished to go, and it seems to have been his intention to sail that unwieldy barge all on its own across the Arabian Sea and on up the Persian Gulf. He went ahead for forty-eight hours with nothing happening, evidently, that was of sufficient importance, in his opinion, to set down in the log. Though it seems to me that if I had been in his place I should have spent all my spare time writing an account of my own emotions and of how the other men were bearing up under their unpleasant prospects. But nothing like that for an all-in-the-day's-work Britisher.

On the 31st of May the wind shifted, then died down, and they began to drift in toward land. In the mere human nature of things land should have looked to them quite inviting enough to make them glad they were drifting toward it, but that was not what they wanted at all. They wanted to get on with their job. When they got in seven fathoms of water they dropped their anchor, and there, hopefully, they clung for three days.

On the 4th of June the wind came up from west by south, so they weighed anchor and headed again for the north-east. But luck was against them. They were becalmed again on the 6th, and began once more to drift in toward shore. Their doom was not sealed, however, until the following evening when 'the wind came on to blow from the north-east and blew hard all night.' The next entry in the log, which the corporal managed to save and

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in which he continued to record his adventures, reads :

June 8.—At about 4 A.M. the wind shifted more to the eastward, and we began to drag our anchors. By noon we were close inshore. The cliffs were crowded with armed Arabs. About 1.30 P.M. our rudder struck the sand, and I hove in on the anchors in the hope that one of them might catch a rock. But nothing came of it, and at 2 P.M. we were well aground and the Arabs swarmed aboard. By 3 P.M. all the crew were ashore, the Arabs having taken everything away from them except what they wore.

When the corporal saw the Arabs coming aboard he ran aft to his room, with an intention of getting his rifle and defending himself. But they were there before him. One already had his rifle and another his kit-bag, while he was just in time to find a third turning out ~~the~~ contents of his locker.

I snatched my bag away from the Arab who had it and threw it on the bunk. Then I tried to take my rifle away from the other. He would not let go, and struck me in the face with his fist. There was a boatswain's fid lying on my bunk, and I picked it up and knocked him down with it. Directly I did I got a heavy blow on the head, and the next thing I knew I was being dragged up the beach. The other men made no resistance, and were not ill-treated. The Arabs who helped me up the beach were taking no part in the looting and seemed to be friendly enough. They asked me by signs if there was any money on board, and I made them understand there was not. Then they made signs that when the barge was stripped the looters would come and cut our throats.

I should like to tell this whole story in the man's own language, but it is too long. He managed to convey to the friendly seeming Arabs that if they would guide him and his men to Muskat and take care of them on the way they would be liberally rewarded by the authorities. And this the Arabs finally agreed to do. But it was difficult to escape

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from the unfriendly tribe; and afterward came a weary, terrible march of thirteen days.

The first night they lay hidden in a cave in the side of a hill, and just before daybreak—his interest in his barge getting the better of his fear of the Arabs—the corporal stole back down the beach for a final inspection. ‘She was lying broadside on the beach,’ he says, ‘so I went back and we started off.’

The way lay over hills, across desert wastes, and along the cliffs of the seashore, and a good part of the time the men had neither food nor drink. Moreover, it was June, and the heat was the heat of June in that hottest of all lands. They had one box of biscuits with them, and at Arab encampments on the way they got goats’ milk and water. But the water in the wells they came across on the long daily marches was nearly always brackish and they suffered terribly from thirst. Many of the Arab encampments they had to avoid because they belonged to tribes unfriendly to the tribe of the men who were guiding them, and they were afraid of being held for ransom.

The corporal continues :

June 10.—The Arabs kept urging us on. They seemed to be afraid the looters would come after us. After we crossed the hills it was flat, sandy plain, and the heat was terrible. We kept going until after sunset. Then we stopped. One of the Arabs went away, and after a while returned with water. It was very bad water, but we were glad to get it. After a drink and a biscuit we went to sleep.

June 12.—Started at dawn and kept on going until 4 P.M. when we reached another encampment. At that encampment they tried to induce our guides to get me to write to Muskat for money, and to keep us there until the money arrived. Our guides would not agree to that.

June 14.—We did not start until about 9 A.M. Then we marched till it was almost dark, when we reached a well. The well was empty. By that time we had finished our biscuits, so we lay down and tried to sleep.

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It was not until three o'clock in the afternoon of the following day that they got either food or water, and by that time they were so exhausted that they had to lose a day in order to rest. After which it is a story of a race with starvation. One day they accidentally discovered a large nest of turtle eggs, a life-saving incident on which the corporal makes naïvely gleeful comment; and at the last encampment they came across they were able to get a few dates to carry along with them. Then comes a final pathetic brief entry in the record :

June 21.—Finished the dates.

Two days after they finished the dates they reached their destination—just thirty-three days from the day they left Aden. They were bathed and fed, looked over by a doctor, and put to sleep. But Corporal Harte did not seem to be interested in being invalidated. He set to work at once, and two days after he landed in Muskat he had gathered together the necessary paraphernalia and, accompanied by all the men of his crew who were fit for service, was off on a naval vessel to rescue his barge. In concluding his unemotional statement he says :

I would like to add that from the time we got adrift until we reached Muskat, I never had any trouble with any of the men. In the desert when we were hungry and thirsty and had no tobacco they neither groused nor whimpered, but took everything as a matter of course.

And it is of such men that the Inland Water Transport of Mesopotamia is made up. If it were not so there could not be an adequate inland water transport, because the difficulties have been such as only heroic and determined men could overcome.

Brigadier-General R. H. W. Hughes, C.M.G., D.S.O., the director of inland water transport—and known in Mesopotamia as the D.I.W.T.—sets the

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example of imperturbability, and seems to regard the whole amazing performance as a matter of course. I tried to get him excited about it so he would tell me stories, but he was interested chiefly in a great dry-dock they were building at Basra. He could get enthusiastic about that. The river Tigris with its shallows and narrows is hard on steamboats, and they get out of repair with irritating frequency. The custom has been to beach them on a low bank of the Shatt-el-Arab at Basra and make the repairs at low tide, but this was far from satisfactory, so everybody has a high regard for the new dry-dock that was so difficult to come by in such a land.

The shipping in the Tigris is now divided into classes, and everything afloat, of whatever variety of craft, carries in large letters, either on its funnel or on its bow, a number and the initials of its class. The P-boats and the S-boats are the paddle-wheelers and stern-wheelers, and when you see 'P-76' or 'S-81' steaming up-river you realise that these classes are fairly large.

Then there are the S-T's—steam-tugs by the hundreds; P-T's—paddle-tugs; P-L's—power-launches; F-B's—flat-barges; S-B's—steam-barges; and so on. And there is a new variety of passenger steamboat, designed to carry troops, and built or building in India, which are paddle-wheeled, but with the wheels astern instead of amidships. They are just beginning to come into the river, and they are principally distinguished in my mind, not because they are queer-looking structures, but because they meet with 'Yukon's' intense disapproval.

Yukon does not believe in paddle-boats for the Tigris, anyhow. They draw too much water, in the first place, and, says he, 'once a paddle-boat gets stuck in the mud, there she sticks until a tug comes along and yanks her off!'

He is for ever dealing in doleful reminiscence

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about the excellence, as he has tested it, of the Yukon River traffic and the superior advantages of the Mississippi River steamboats.

‘Them Mississippi boats !’ says he. ‘Gosh ! They carry a thousand ton a clip, with plenty o’ space to spare, an’ draw about two foot o’ water ! Say ! These Britishers don’t know nothin’ ’bout rivers, nohow. When they want a model for a steamboat why don’t they consult some one with river sense ? Look at them new paddle-wheelers now ! Wide enough at the stern to scrape the sides out o’ the Narrers and push everything else out o’ the river ! An’ say !—down at the head four feet at least, with nothin’ in ’em ! We ’ll have a pile of ’em stacked up in the mud along above Qurnah one o’ these days, an’ we ’ll have to use dynamite to get ’em out o’ the way ! ’

But perhaps Yukon should be introduced in a less casual way.

CHAPTER XIII

UP THE RIVER TIGRIS

THEY had told him that I was an American, and that if I could not speak his language I would at least be able to understand it—which was more than they could do. So he was what he called ‘lookin’ forrad to meetin’ me. They had also told me about him, describing him as a ‘character,’ and while I, too, was ‘lookin’ forrad’ I really expected to encounter in him a kind of British imitation of what they said he was—a woolly Westerner. I was all wrong. I found he was the genuine article; not so very wild, but certainly woolly.

‘Ye-e-ep,’ he said, ‘been livin’ in the great North-west since I was knee-high. An’ say, if this ol’ war ever lets up an’ I live to get back! Well, they won’t have to tie me to no post! I’ll stan’ without hitchin’, all right, all right!’

‘Ever been to Vancouver?’ he suddenly exclaimed.

I smiled and nodded.

‘You have! Well, now, then I ask you! Ain’t that one o’ the grandest towns on earth? Say, I’ve got six corner lots in that town, an’ I wouldn’t take less ’n a hundred thousand dollars for ‘em! They only cost me a hundred dollars apiece, but I got in on the ground floor. These British army officers don’t know nothin’. I been tellin’ ‘em about that country out there till I’m black in the face. But they think I’m prejudiced. They won’t pay no attention to me. Now *you* tell ‘em! ’

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I doubt if many persons ever heard his real name. He is known as 'Yukon' from one end of Mesopotamia to the other, because, once having run a steamboat on the Yukon River, he is given to comparing that stream with the river Tigris or every possible occasion, and invariably to the great disadvantage of the Tigris. Moreover, he has a Yukonese cast of ruddy countenance, a Yukonese muscularity and freedom of movement and manner, and a Yukonese picturesqueness of diction and expletive that would make him a marked man anywhere.

I am afraid that as a kindred spirit I disappointed him from the outset. I could most enthusiastically back his opinion of His British Majesty's great North-West, but my language has been thinned and clarified by a too long association with the less fortunate inhabitants of the effete American East, and I could see that he began at once to regard me as most unrepresentative of the country he calls 'God's own.' And when he says 'God's own' he means 'the good old U.S.A.', for which he has an ardent affection.

I did not meet him until he came to the mess one evening to tell us that the S-1 was all right as to engine repairs and coal, and would be ready to get away up-river next morning at any hour the General might wish to start. But after that I saw him, as he would say, 'some frequent an' considerable.'

The S-1—otherwise Stern-wheeler Number One—is the boat on which the Inspector-General of Communications travels up and down the Tigris; and Yukon is her captain. She began life as an open-decked passenger-craft on a far-away river somewhere, but since she made her own courageous way into the Tigris fleet she has undergone a number of disfiguring but amplifying improvements and has had a most thrilling career.

We were to leave Basra at eight in the morning,

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the General having telegraphed ahead for a conference with his officers at Qurnah at half-past eleven. I was aboard betimes, followed by Ezekiel—that servant of mine—who managed, with characteristic nonchalance and the assistance of about six coolies, to stow my kit—bed and bedding, camp table, chair, boxes, and bags—in passageways and deck spaces where it would do the most good as an obstruction and a nuisance.

Among Ezekiel's other objectionable habits, he wears European clothes instead of the graceful draperies of the usual Indian, and he came aboard the S-1 arrayed in a suit of black-and-white-checked flannel which caused a commotion even among the animals on the lower deck. The General's and the Major's riding-horses pawed their stalls and nickered inquiringly, while the plaintive bleats of two pet Persian lambs were as a kind of 'cello obbligato to the cackling and squawking of the fowls in their coops. Yukon remarked :

' Well, I won't have to use no horn or whistle this trip ! '

It was the intention of my host and his staff that I should realise none of my expectations with regard to hardships and discomfort. I had come aboard prepared to furnish a bare little cabin with my own kit and to make the best of next to nothing. I knew that was what the Major and the A.D.C. would have to do, because in Mesopot officers get along with a minimum of personal impedimenta, and they make that minimum serve on all occasions. Each has his own camp bed, his own blankets and linen, and everything strictly necessary, and wherever he goes he takes his kit along and makes arrangements for his own comfort, or lives in discomfort for which he has nobody but himself to blame.

Nothing like that for their 'lady visitor.' They had a surprise in store for me, and they proudly ushered me into a cabin which put me in a class by

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myself. It was amusing and wonderful ! Persian rugs and rose-bordered yellow draperies were the chief items of decoration—goodness knows where they got them !—and against one wall there was a writing-table on which they had placed a large square of spotless blotting-paper and a green-shaded reading-lamp. What more could any one wish for on the river Tigris ? My camp bed was covered with a gay travelling-rug and an electric fan was humming in a corner.

The General's cabin and office is a large room up forward under the bridge, in which he has some shelves of reference books, many maps, and a big, busy-looking desk, while the other accommodations are a half-dozen tiny rooms down either side of the deck, which, before the servants got the camp beds and tables and things in their places, were as bare as though they had never been lived in.

The mess-room is amidships alongside the telegraph office and the stenographers' quarters, while down at the end of the deck, just over the great, churning-wheel, are two well-furnished bathrooms —‘fitted up,’ said the General, ‘with porcelain looted from an over-supply of hospital equipment at a time when the authorities seemed to have been struck with a sudden idea that the way to win the war was to send bath-tubs to Mesopotamia.’ For a long time Mesopotamia had practically no bath-tubs at all.

All these living quarters constitute what I have referred to as disfiguring but amplifying improvements. They are all built of canvas nailed to plain, unpainted uprights and cross-timbers, and since the curious old boat draws only between three and four feet of water, and has a wide-open lower deck, they make her look top-heavy. But makeshift and quaint as she is, she is very comfortable.

On the lower deck, besides the horses, the lambs, the chickens, and the General's automobile, we had a small host of servants, the Indian crew, and a

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Punjabi guard—the guard being necessary in case of attack by Arabs.

Yukon gave me the freedom of the bridge, which is very high, and to which I had to climb by a steep ladder, and I spent most of my time in a comfortable chair in one corner of it, gazing in utter enthralment at a vast panoramic world that was new to me.

There is no river anywhere on earth like the Tigris. Even the Euphrates, its sister stream, which runs through similar country, is wholly different.

The main current of the Euphrates used to join the Tigris at Qurnah, but in order to reclaim areas that were rapidly drying up into a desert waste for want of irrigation, a British company completed in 1914 a great barrage at Hindiyeh—north of Babylon—which had the effect of turning the principal stream into a formerly thin and silted-up channel to the southward. So the Euphrates now flows grandly into the Shatt-el-Arab about ten miles above Basra, while the branch running across to Qurnah has dwindled to very meagre proportions.

Between Basra and Qurnah the banks of the Shatt-el-Arab are lined with date-gardens, and in its gentle placidity the broad river reflects everything very deeply. Its edges gleam silvery green with the dust-silvered green of the palms, while here and there a tawny stretch lies under a shelving bank of clay, on which, perhaps, may stand a row of ancient brick-kilns which look like castle ruins or mediæval watch-towers. It really is very beautiful.

We arrived at Qurnah at the appointed hour, and while the General and the Major went off for their conference, the A.D.C. and I wandered in deep dust through the lanelike streets and out into the surrounding palm-groves where the army camps are located.

Qurnah is regarded by the men of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force as the least attrac-

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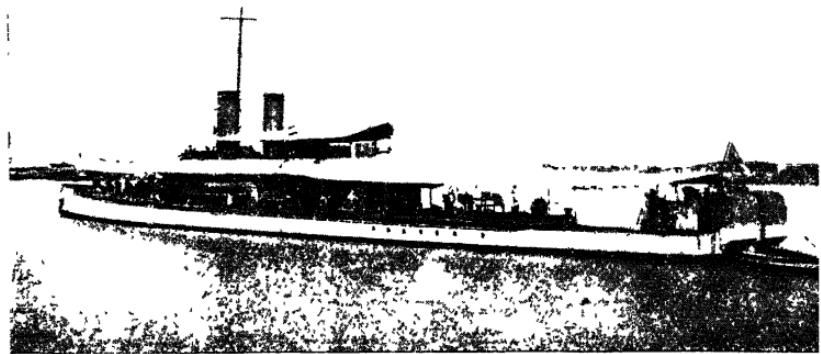
tive place in all Mesopotamia, and that is saying nothing whatever for the rest of Mesopotamia. But to be sent to Qurnah for service is to be punished for your sins. I have referred to the fact that the summer temperature of Mesopot ranges between 110° and 130°. At Qurnah, where there is more humidity than at any other point on the river, this is accompanied by a heavy, saturating mugginess that is fairly prostrating.

In the spring of 1916, when the force was trying to relieve General Townshend at Kut, a poor Tommy who was dying of heatstroke called it 'the hill station for hell,' but as the summer wore on this was improved upon by other Tommies, who liked to refer to hell as 'the hill station for Qurnah,' and to pretend that a month's leave in hell would do them a world of good.

Yet hoary tradition—the legends of the ages—has made the site of Qurnah the Garden of Eden. It answers so many of the descriptions in Genesis that for a long time it was generally accepted as the probable scene of that event in human history known to us as The Creation.

It has its rivals, but not in the mind of any British soldier who has lived and worked and fought in Mesopotamia. All such unfortunate boys are quite satisfied that Qurnah is the Garden of Eden, and being permitted to fight in the Garden of Eden has been one of their compensations for having to fight at all in such an ungodly land.

They have given all the principal streets in Qurnah new names, and in order to make them more or less permanent—since troops come and go in such a place—they have painted them on neat signboards and have set these up at the corners. Many of the streets run out from a small plaza, which is as blank and bare and unsightly as anything well could be, and this they have named Temptation Square.



A visit to one of the monitors.



A British river gunboat on the Karun river at Muhammerah.

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Then there are Eve's Walk, Serpent's Crescent, Adam's Lane, Fatal Bite Avenue, Apple Alley, and a number of others that I am not able to remember. And even the Arabs in a measure have adopted these names and are tremendously pleased by any reference to the anciently historic importance of their most un-Eden-like town.

Back aboard the S-1, I went up to the high bridge, from which I could see the whole community and all that lay huddled round its edges. The army camps and the corrals and the remount depots under the palm-trees I could not see, but down the river-bank were signs of war industry in the form of pyramids of grain and hay and rough mat-shed warehouses overflowing with supplies waiting to be transported up-river, or being reserved here for possible emergency. Gangs of labourers were at work laying more sidings and building freight-sheds for the new railway which now connects Basra with Baghdad—and therefore with the battle-lines beyond.

The town of Qurnah is a kind of baked-mud horror, with no architectural ornamentation that I could see to relieve its flat-roofed and almost windowless monotony. It has about three thousand Arab inhabitants, and I think a majority of them—the men, at least—spend most of their time on the river-front watching the army shipping going up and down. And truly it is a wonderful sight! A short way up the Bund a number of them were sitting, with legs tucked under them, on high benches in front of a coffee-house, sipping some kind of liquid from small glasses, smoking their water-pipes and talking, no doubt, about the unsupportable strenuousness and orderliness of life with Mesopotamia under British control.

Then the Political Commissioner—the local D.P.C.—came aboard to call on me and to offer me anything he might have in his possession in the way of information.

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I invited him up on the bridge, and the first thing he told me was that we were tied up in the shade of the Tree itself. That is, we would have been in its shade if it had been casting any. It was high noon, the burning sun was straight overhead, and the gnarled and knotted branches of the Tree seemed to be dropping wearily beneath it. It was very interesting; though it gave me a momentary feeling that would be difficult to describe to be told that there was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—right there! It didn't sound quite reasonable.

‘Is it a very old tree?’ I asked.

‘Well—uh—rather! It’s the Adam and Eve tree.’

‘Yes, but you know what I mean.’

‘Of course! And as a matter of fact it is an old tree. It’s older than the oldest inhabitant, and he’s over a hundred. And he says it was old when his great-grandfather was born. But you see it doesn’t claim to be the original Tree. It’s only a descendant of the original Tree, though it does stand on the original spot.’

‘Oh, does it? But the Bible says “in the midst of the garden,” and this tree is on the river-bank.’

‘Oh, well, the river may have been miles away from here at that time! In fact, you can’t tell even nowadays where the Tigris is going to be from one year’s end to another.’

This was slandering the Tigris, but it has an awful reputation for wandering round at loose ends, so I had nothing to offer in its defence.

‘Do the Arabs really believe in this tree?’ I asked.

‘No, not unreservedly. At least it is not regarded as particularly sacred. But there is a tree over there—the feathery one hanging over the dome of the mosque—that they do believe in. In fact, they are tremendously superstitious about it. It was planted by Noah.’

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All of which may sound like ‘kidding,’ but it was not at all. We were quite serious. We were not even smiling. I assure you that in this extraordinary country, where one sees Noahs and Father Abrahams in real life on every hand, and where the days of the Flood seem far less remote than the Middle Ages of Europe, one makes and accepts such statements quite matter-of-factly and without realising in the least their absurdity.

Incidentally, nobody who has ever lived through a spring and early summer in Mesopotamia doubts the story of the Flood. It is accepted by everybody with the utmost simplicity of belief, except that it is understood that the world the Lord destroyed was only Noah’s world.

The rain does descend upon the earth in sheets and layers for forty days and forty nights—which is not such a long rainy season, after all. But it is not the rains which cause the rivers to spread themselves out over the whole visible area, it is the melting of the snows up in the Armenian hills where the rivers rise.

What really happened was that a couple of floodless seasons passed during which it was abnormally cold up around the Black Sea, and Mr. Noah, being a wise old patriarch, said to himself:

‘We’re going to have a ripping-hot spring along about next year and the accumulated snows in the mountains are going to melt and the waters are going to pour down into the Land of the Two Rivers in the worst flood we’ve had in centuries. I shall build me an ark and get ready for it.’

Which he did. He was at that time about six hundred years old, you know, so his memory—enriched, too, by the teachings and traditions of his fathers—covered a considerable period.

Everything happened as he prognosticated, and it came to pass that because he could get nobody else to believe in preparedness he was the only inhabitant who had a refuge ready and stocked

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with enough provisions to tide him and his family over the drowning-out period.

As for Ararat—the whole country is covered with mounds which are the ruins of ancient mud villages—or even of great cities—and in the language of the people these mounds are called ‘ararats.’ There never has been any building material except mud—sometimes baked into imperishable bricks—and mud structures fall into ruin very quickly. There is no reason to believe that before Noah’s time there were no such mounds in Mesopotamia. And there is no reason to think that the ararat of to-day was not an ararat eight or ten thousand years ago.

I myself have picked out of the walls of excavated ruins bricks that had been right where I found them for something like five thousand years. And still embedded in the bitumen which held them in their places was perfectly good straw-coloured straw which might have been produced with last year’s crop of oats. What are a few thousand years more or less—in Mesopotamia?

Noah’s Ark grounded on an ararat, and he was hung up high and dry. He probably tried to get her off into deep water, but, failing in this, was compelled to stay where he was until the flood receded and the ground got into fit condition to be cultivated.

This ararat theory is really the General’s, but it impresses me as being so entirely reasonable that I cannot resist the temptation to pass it on.

The men who took part in the first operations north from Qurnah, and in the subsequent operations for the relief of Kut, knew all about the Flood. For them ‘the waters prevailed upon the earth’ during months on end, and the flood was accompanied by an intolerable heat against which they had no kind of protection; also by a plague of poisonous insects.

It is the consensus of opinion in Mesopotamia that Noah exceeded his instructions with regard to pestiferous insects, and especially with regard to

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sand-flies and certain breeds of mosquitoes. There is one variety of mosquito that is extraordinarily numerous and particularly detested. It has little striped legs and is a very pretty insect, but it is absolutely without sporting instinct—the meanest thing alive. It has no buzz; it utters no warning sound of any kind; and it seems even to be at pains not to tickle the spot on which it lights. Like thistle-down it floats in the air and like thistle-down it settles on any exposed point of human skin and proceeds to attend to its immediate business with a vigour and viciousness that nothing else could equal. And it leaves a frightfully inflamed mark which frequently develops into a shocking sore that takes weeks to heal and is likely to disfigure one for life. Since more often than not it finds the face of its victim the most easily get-atable foraging area, it is a creature to be feared.

But we must get on up the Tigris. Above Qurnah the palm-gardens along the river-banks leave off and the limitless, mirage-filled desert begins; then for a week one sees only limitless, mirage-filled desert. To be sure, there are occasional river-bank oases, and there are mud- and reed-hut villages, towns, tombs, and mosques, Bedouin encampments, herds and hosts, army bases and marching-posts, and the endless moving picture of busy war life on the river. Also there are flaming dawns and thrilling sunsets.

One day I was reading a book which a certain Anglican bishop wrote about his connection with the operations in Mesopotamia, and I noticed that he liked too well a phrase that he was constantly making use of in quotation marks. Men marched off ‘into the blue’; he gazed ‘into the blue’; he sent messages which might or might not be delivered ‘into the blue.’ And there isn’t any blue in the country. At least, not enough to make one think blue.

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There is a steely kind of sky overhead most of the time, and the distances into which men march and into which one gazes are mauve and amber, dove grey and olive green, with slashes and banks of burning orange on the horizon at sunset—the effect, they say, of dust in the air.

And the Tigris, lying higher in most places than the country on either side of it, is a still stream into which the colours melt in a curious, indescribable way. But when I speak of the desert as what one mostly sees I am thinking of the lure of wide-flung space and of how inevitably one's eyes lift and seek, above and beyond the immediateness of things, the far horizons. That is Mesopotamia.

I thought, as we went along, what a silent, lonesome river it must have been in peace-times ; how sleepy the villages ; how noiseless the towns ; how somnolent the Arab encampments in the patches of camel-thorn.

Throughout the river's length one sees at irregular intervals ancient water-drawing stations. They call them wells, but they are only cuts in the banks over which a framework is built to carry goatskin buckets that are raised and lowered on a windlass. Attached to one end of the rope is usually a bullock or a donkey, and as he ambles down the slope of the embankment and the dripping brown water-bags rise drearily from the river, the windlass creaks with a slow, mournful, drowsing sound that is like no other sound I ever heard. That and the far-away lost-soul shrieks of many jackals are the only sounds one hears in the orange-mellow twilights.

How dark it must have been, too, yet how perfect the moon and the starshine ; and how undisturbed the river's current when it was cut by the prow of no swifter-moving thing than a mahayla or a dhow or a slender belum gliding along under the clean, quiet paddle-strokes of Arab boatmen.

About thirty miles up-river from Qurnah we come

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to Ezra's tomb. It is an ancient and curious monument, and from my standpoint it was a very desirable thing that we should get to it before nightfall; but we had lingered too long, and the sun was rapidly sinking in a flood of its own wonderful light before we saw, across a dozen all but circular curves, the grove of palms on the river-bank in which it nestles. It would be all but dark before we could wind our slow way up to it, though as the crow flies we could have reached it in twenty minutes.

However, Ezra's tomb with deep evening shadows of palm-trees lying in its darkening courtyard and its perfect blue-enamelled dome lifted up in the last light of day, offers more to one's imagination than such an impossible thing as an Ezra's tomb might, perhaps, in the glare of a midday sun.

It was beside these waters that the children of the Babylonian captivity 'sat down and wept.' And when 'the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia' 'to build Him an house at Jerusalem,' it was up and down these waters and the waters of the Euphrates, and across the then fertile plains now desert wastes, that the King's emissaries came and went, gathering together treasure for the Jews and seeking 'the vessels of the house of the Lord which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem.'

'And after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra went up from Babylon.'

'I make a decree,' said the King, 'that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.'

In addition to which more gold and silver and more precious things were poured into the hands of the departing children of Israel, and favours were heaped upon Ezra until he was moved to exclaim : 'Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart. . . . And hath extended mercy unto me before

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the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes.'

One wants to ask, 'And is he really buried here ?'

But it is a foolish question. The beautiful mosquelike tomb which bears his name is one of the oldest monuments on earth; not in its present form, perhaps, because it has been built and rebuilt, modelled and remodelled, and has at present a decidedly Mohammedan aspect. But even in its present form it is very old, and its perfect state of preservation is probably due to the fact that, while it is a shrine to which the Jews of the ages have made pilgrimages, it is venerated no less by peoples of all other faiths.

When the British were pursuing the Turks up the river, it was by mutual but unexpressed understanding that a wide detour was made by both armies in order to avoid the possibility of damaging the sacred structure. There has been some skirmishing in its immediate vicinity, but, thanks to the precaution of the contending forces, there is only one little bullet-snick in the blue enamel of its dome to prove that it has witnessed some of the action in the greatest of all wars.

Nowadays it is carefully guarded by British soldiers who live in a small stockade at the edge of the palm-grove. They were drawn up within their sand-bagged and wire-entangled shelter to salute the Inspector-General as we passed on up the river.

CHAPTER XIV

ON UP THE TIGRIS

THE Tigris is a mighty river mightily needed—a river essential to the successful prosecution of the war, yet a river devoid of almost every admirable attribute. It apparently conforms to no law of nature ; it is a profligate, abandoned and depraved ; a winder and a wanderer in devious ways ; a waster and a slacker.

One gets personal with regard to the Tigris, It cannot be helped. Even the matter-of-fact British engineers, steamboat captains, and pilots who have to deal with its idiosyncrasies maintain toward it a curiously un-matter-of-fact and personal attitude. It is as though they thought of it as possessing a kind of human intelligence along with a disposition to go wrong on the slightest provocation. Wherefore a tacit understanding that it is not to be provoked. Any briefest interruption of its career of present usefulness would be an unimaginable calamity, so they take no chances by assuming toward it a too great degree of authority.

They coax and cajole it ; they go to the greatest pains to humour its innumerable moods ; and it is only with the utmost precaution that they undertake any measure of interference with its waywardness, or, as they would rather say, its ‘ general cussedness.’

It is the most extraordinary river on earth. Of course it is very old in the service of mankind, and its habits have been fastened upon through ages of human neglect and abuse, so one really loves it rather and feels inclined to apologise for it. But

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the problem of its reformation is yet to be solved in the minds of the engineers.

It is navigable for steam-craft a full four hundred and fifty miles—or from a point a short distance above Baghdad to its junction with the Shatt-el-Arab at Qurnah—yet its narrowest and at the same time its shallowest stretch is within thirty miles of its mouth. This is against all natural law ; but, as I say, it conforms to no natural law, and in The Narrows is written the full story of it ; in The Narrows is revealed the true character of the unique and anciently historic stream in all its abandoned abnormality.

The explanation lies in the fact that in its navigable length it has but one tributary, the Diyala, which joins it about nineteen miles below Baghdad ; while it has innumerable *distributaries*—streams large and small which flow *out* of it, emptying it of its waters without let or hindrance, with an utter disregard of the consequences to its navigability, and, since they are uncontrolled, to no purpose but to create great swamps in the desert. These swamps have been a fearful menace always to the armies in operation, and have habits of undependability and instability no less extraordinary than the habits of the river that creates them.

The principal distributary is the Shatt-el-Hai, supposed to be the ancient Tigris itself, which flows out just below Kut-el-Amara, and, stretching across the great interland between the two rivers, joins the Euphrates at Nasriyeh, an important point which was occupied by the British Army of the Euphrates in the summer of 1915, when General Townshend was advancing up the Tigris to Kut-el-Amara. Most of the distributaries are man-made ; water-cuts and canals that were at one time a part of a great system of irrigation ; but the Shatt-el-Hai evidently is not, and it is thought also that the Tigris cut for itself the worst water thief of them all, the Jahalah, which branches off

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directly above Amara, and, with a bed of six feet below the bed of the Tigris, carries a tremendous volume of water out across the desert to the eastward, and deposits it in a spreading, bubbling, fever-breeding marsh.

After which the river, being tapped at intervals all the way down, begins to decrease in volume until it runs spindling into The Narrows ; a once splendid stream reduced to less than two hundred feet in width, and with a depth at its normal best of not more than six feet. Below The Narrows it begins to 'come home from the marshes' in many small trickling creeks, and in a curious seepage which makes miles upon miles of the country along the east bank exceedingly dangerous if not quite impassable except in the driest of seasons.

In addition to all of which the bottom of the river is formed of shifting sands that are played upon and tumbled about by the current, with the result that no steamboat's prow is ever sure of an unobstructed course. Yet for nearly three years the main division of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force had to depend exclusively on the river Tigris for communications and supplies.

There is a railroad a great part of the way from Baghdad to Basra, and the attitude of strained anxiety and respectful cajolery on the part of the engineers and pilots could be relaxed if it had not become a habit. But it is a habit, and, besides, the river is still of sufficient importance to occupy first place in the general scheme of things.

At Amara, where the Jahalah rolls out in such a recklessly destructive volume, it was decided that some kind of gently suggestive obstacle across the distributary channel would be necessary if the river below was to be kept continuously navigable for the kind of boats the supply and transport service had to use. So the river engineers sank an old steamboat in such a position that it would serve to deflect the current by the merest fraction. That

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was as much as they dared to do. It added something to the volume of the Tigris without disturbing its usual habit and causing it to seek an outlet somewhere else, as it invariably threatens to do if it is even harshly spoken to.

Then a river patrol was established and entrusted with the task of keeping up with the changes in the main channel and keeping that channel buoyed for the benefit of traffic, while a small barrage here and there was constructed for the purpose of coaxing the more active sand-bars to shift themselves out of the way.

But perhaps I am managing to suggest that the current is swift. It is not. Baghdad, five hundred and sixty-five miles by river from the Persian Gulf, is only one hundred and twelve feet above sea-level, while Qurnah, one hundred and twelve miles from the gulf, is only ten and a half feet above sea-level. So one always thinks of the Tigris as a still river, and it is because it is so still that it has such a strangely tranquillising charm.

In The Narrows practically everything afloat in the Tigris has at one time or another been 'stuck in the mud' or jammed tight in between the banks of one of the many sharp bends. There is one bend known as the Devil's Elbow, and it did not come by its name through anybody's misconception of its character. It is an acute angle round which only the most expert of pilots can get a steamboat without the assistance of anchors and winches, and it is every pilot's dread.

When the British were advancing up the Tigris with more speed than they were really prepared to make, The Narrows witnessed many a scene that was equivalent to two trains attempting to pass each other on the same track. But eventually a block-signal control was established, and, since the business of supply and transport goes on night and day, an electric power-plant was built and the

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banks were lined on either side with high arc-lights.

These banks are now as smooth as though they had been planed and polished—the result of their almost constant contact with the sides of barges as these are squeezed through, lashed to tugs or other small steam-craft.

All of this has to do with the Tigris at low water or at normal depth, and is only half the story. Along in March the snows up-country begin to melt and the floods begin to pour down the two rivers. At Baghdad the Tigris has a rise and fall of more than twenty feet, and has frequently been known to rise as much as three feet in one night.

If some of the river's astonishing sinuosities could be eliminated by means of dams and canals its length between Basra and Baghdad could be shortened by at least two hundred miles ; but when I innocently asked one of the engineers why this should not be done he answered me with arched eyebrows and an air that I could not fail to recognise as indicating a politely patient tolerance of my stupidity.

During the floods all trace of the banks along the middle reaches of the river—and down below Amara as well—disappears, and at the beginning of things it was not at all unusual for a steamboat loaded with troops or supplies to miss a bend altogether. keep straight ahead on an overland course, and go hard aground out somewhere in the middle of a plain. Grounded on an ararat, all same Noah !

Something had to be done, of course, to decrease the possibility of such calamities, so eventually the bends were all marked with channel-indicators —tall poles set at each river angle toward which a boat's prow should point. And these poles are usually topped with spreading basket-like arrangements in which the storks—the most numerous birds in Mesopotamia—build their great, shaggy

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nests, thereby adding a touch of delightful pictur-esque ness to a merely utilitarian contrivance.

But I must not go on too long with dull details about a river that is not dull in any sense or degree. Yukon was wont to describe it with appropriate expectorative emphasis as ‘ Phh-t—durned ’ similar and monotonous ! ’

But I could not agree with him. And especially in the late afternoons, when the sun usually turns the more or less nothing by way of landscape through which it flows into a knobbed and hillocked, horizon-wide plain filled with points and deep cups of indescribable light. I was always on the bridge for such hours as these, and one evening when I was finding it quite impossible to refrain from expressing my delight in the scene that lay all about us, stretching away and away to the ends of nowhere, Yukon, standing behind the big wheel with his eyes fixed on the river ahead, drawled, in reply to my exclamations :

‘ Well, I don’t want to be no kill-joy, but if I live to get back down to Basra it ’ll be my fiftieth trip, an’ it didn’t take me more ’n about forty-seven trips to get over what you ’re a-sufferin’ from now.’

To me it was wonderful in the pearl-grey and mauve-shot mornings, too, and there was always temptation to be up with the dawn. Across the flats and along the marsh edges beyond there are thousands of sand-grouse, black partridge, different varieties of duck and other wild-fowl, and the General liked, whenever a relaxation of business demands made it possible, to bank in in the early hours at any casually selected spot, and, with a happy staff and a pleased Punjabi guard in attendance, to trudge off across country on a shooting expedition. And, though he was always good-naturedly complaining that the troops of the flying columns and others in garrison along the river

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were destroying the birds and rapidly bringing about a situation that would call for rigid game laws, he never came back aboard without a fairly good bag with which to supplement a none too varied war ration.

On one of these early mornings, when everybody was ashore and a silence reigned on the old boat that made me positively nervous, I joined Yukon on the bridge and found him leaning against the rail, muttering to himself bitter-seeming complaints. We could see the shooting-party in the distance tramping homeward across a desolate stretch of dust and camel-thorn—all there was by way of a feast of scenery—and Yukon had already given orders for the engine-room crew to stand by. We would be off the instant the men got aboard.

Two high-turbaned Indian sentries stood on either side of the narrow gangway, facing the desert, and a barefoot, white-clad Arab cabin-boy was running up and down the clay bank, with a pet Persian lamb baaing foolishly at his heels.

‘What’s the trouble, Captain?’ I asked.

‘Aw, nothin’,’ he growled, ‘only I do wish the General ’d make a plan an’ stick to it. But he won’t, so what’s the use! Say, when it’s a hurry call from up-river you c’n bet it’s a case of push straight through an’ never mind eatin’ or sleepin’ or nothin’. An’ I don’t mind that. I don’t mind bein’ rushed. But when they ain’t nothin’ urgent I never know where I’m at. It’s a case o’ stand by an’ wait for orders. An’ like as not the orders when I do get ’em ’ll be unreasonable. Now he’s asked me to make Amara by eleven o’clock this morning. Huh! Swell chance!’ He paused and a gleam of humour began to twinkle in his eye. Then he laughed. ‘Suppose he thinks I won’t be able to do it, now he’s wasted an hour an’ a half here. Well,’ he chuckled, ‘you just watch my smoke!’ And he beamed affectionately upon the returning sportsmen.

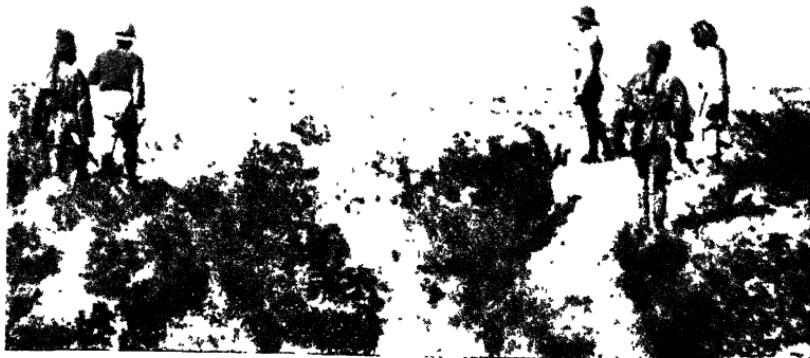
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The last act on these occasions before the gang-plank was drawn in was always the ceremonious relief of the sentries on the bank. We might be in the exact and wholly uninhabited geographical centre of nowhere—which is what much of the country looks like at times—but the Indian officer of the guard never relaxed discipline for a single instant. I thought to myself, why can't the sentries just shoulder their rifles and come on aboard? Why all this R'm-umph! Sho-rumph! Mar-r-umph! stuff under such circumstances? It interested me, and I spoke to one of the British officers about it.

'Well, naturally,' he said, 'discipline is never relaxed. Besides, the guard is not for ornamental purposes, you know. You can't tell by a glance at an empty desert how many Arabs might rise up out of it, and an Arab raid at any moment is not the least-to-be-expected thing anywhere along the river.'

We were well under way before the excitement incident to the morning's sport subsided; then we got through a leisurely breakfast, and the day's work began. The General retired to his desk in the big room up forward under the bridge; the Major and the A.D.C. began, as usual, to labour over code messages at the mess-room table, while Richard, the butler, cleaned up and bossed the other boys around in the process of getting everything ship-shape. The sergeant-major—stenographer and wireless operator—with his glengarry cap on the side of his head, a pencil behind his ear, and a sheaf of papers always in his hand, passed back and forth between his office and the General's cabin, while orderlies stood about, waiting for orders.

The sounds to be heard were as grace notes punctuating a great monotone of silence. The steady tranquil wash of the wheel astern was a part of the silence itself; but not so the whinny and stamp of the riding-horses in their stalls on the deck below,



Battlefield of Sunnaiyat. The General at the left, the A.D.C. at
at the right of an old trench.



On the battlefield of Sunnaiyat. An Arab ghoul.

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and not so the occasional plaintive bleat of a pet Persian lamb or the squawk of a chicken in the coop —one of several that surely would have been killed for our dinner if the shooting-party had come back empty-handed.

It was nearly eleven when I suddenly remembered that I must go up on the bridge and make inquiries about our prospects. Yukon had intimated that he would get to Amara by eleven in spite of the utter impossibility of such a thing, and I was interested. I climbed the steep ladder up alongside the funnel, which I had learned by that time to negotiate with considerable agility, and as I thrust my head through the trap-door I called out cheerily:

‘Hello, Captain ! Going to make it ?’

‘Goin’ to make what ?’ he growled. As though he didn’t know what I meant !

‘Amara by eleven,’ I humoured him.

He turned from the wheel and regarded me solemnly for a moment, then his face crinkled up in a funny smile.

‘Amara,’ he said, ‘is just round the next bend. An’ say, I bet the General thinks we’re ’bout an hour an’ a half late and hasn’t even looked out of ’is winda to see where we’re at. Not that he’d know, even if ’e did look. The scenery along this so-called river ain’t got many distinguishin’ features, an’ I wouldn’t know where I was at myself half the time if it wasn’t for the chart. Thought I was bluffin’ ’bout gettin’ to Amara by eleven, didn’t you ?’

From his air of boyish triumph one would have thought he had been pounding the engines out of the old craft and making unprecedented speed. But six or seven miles an hour was about her limit, and especially when the water in the river was low, or what he called ‘terrible thin.’ Only the evening before he had remarked :

‘It’s just so durn thin that the paddle can’t get no holt at all !’

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And I had remembered. He had not been making up any time. That was certain.

'How'd you do it, Captain?' I asked.

'Well, I'll just tell you,' he replied, 'but you mustn't tell nobody else. I knowed the General wanted to be at Amara by eleven, an' I knowed mighty well he'd want to go shootin' in that patch o' camel-thorn back yonder, so I just slipped a couple o' hours up my sleeve.'

Which meant that he had run farther than he ordinarily would before anchoring for the night, and that he had started with the first streak of dawn when everybody else was asleep.

It was on the stroke of eleven that we pulled in against the high west bank opposite the town of Amara, and the boys were just throwing out the gangway when the General stepped out of his cabin, all belted and spurred, drawing on his gloves. He cast an appreciative smile upon Yukon and said :

'Good work, skipper! Didn't think you could do it by half!'

And the funny part of it was that each knew that the other knew all about the boyish little game they were playing. But they were quite serious about it, and Yukon, who had come down from the bridge for just that little tribute and nothing else, turned redder under the red of his sunburnt skin and began to shout angry-sounding orders to the men who were securing the gangway. I was leaning against the rail, watching the performance, and for further relief he turned to me and said :

'Say, I might just as well be killed in this war, 'cause I'm goin' to get hung, anyhow! I'm goin' to murder seven Airbs in cold blood 'fore I'm through 'th this show!'

I laughed in hearty appreciation of his laudable intention, and groaned a suitable comment as I counted just seven waterside coolies awkwardly engaged in the single simple act of attaching a rope to a peg in the ground. The peculiarities of coolie

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labour corps are far too peculiar and complex to be dealt with parenthetically, so I shall resist the temptation that assails me to enumerate them. If withering sarcasm and forceful expletives of exasperation could slay, Yukon would have rounded out his useful career right then and there.

The horses were led ashore, and the General and the Major swung into the saddles and started off on a tour of inspection round the corner—the sheds and railway yards, the acres of piled and pyramided supplies, the mule and remount depots, the artillery and munitions areas, and a number of great tented and huddled and handsomely housed hospitals. The A.D.C. and I were at liberty then to go wherever we liked.

Amara is somewhat of a city, and it is somewhat surprising to come upon it in the midst of the barrenness and the aridity of the land through which the Tigris flows in its middle reaches. It came to Abdul-Hamid, I believe, as a sort of dowry with one of his many wives, and he conceived for it a special fancy along with an idea that it might be developed into a valuable trade centre and point of strategical advantage. It is connected by caravan routes with points in Persia and is the centre of a *sanjak*, or governmental district. It has fine barracks, and was a Turkish military post before the war where a battalion at least was always quartered.

The town lies on the east bank of the river and has a good brick pier that is a half-mile long.

There used to be a curious old bridge of wooden boats across the two hundred and fifty yards of river, but this has been replaced by a modern structure of great steel pontoons which swings back quite majestically to let the river traffic through. It is named the MacMunn Bridge in honour of mine host, the man who has developed the lines of communication in Mesopot.

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A row of fine two-storied houses with projecting latticed windows, forms the river-front, while a single tall and slender minaret lifts itself above the flat expanse of mud roofs. Extending eastward through the heart of the city is the most pretentious bazaar in all Mesopotamia. This was built by Abdul-Hamid, who is supposed to have paid out of his own private purse for its lofty and splendidly constructed brick vaulting. All of which is remarkable only because in all the land there is no other example of Turkish enterprise and right-minded ambition.

Amara has been in British hands since it was occupied by General Townshend on 3rd June 1915, and has always been the principal base between the battle-lines and Basra.

Having had its baptism of British blood, it has become regenerate. Its cleanliness is as the cleanliness of the new pin—this, perhaps, being due to the fact that it is one vast hospital. Nearly all the fine river-front buildings are hospitals these days, and there are acres of huttet and tented hospitals lying out around the city's edges. There are between fifteen and twenty thousand beds in Amara, and medical officers and nursing sisters like it better than any other place in Mesopotamia because its climate, for some reason, is just a degree or so less intolerable than the same climate elsewhere. And what with its railroad and repair shops and its new smokestacked industries of various kinds, one would be inclined to think that its age-old somnolence had departed from it for all time.

And it is a fact, surprising under the circumstances, perhaps, that few things the British have built in Mesopotamia, few of the improvements they have made, have the appearance of being for temporary use. Surprising under the circumstances? No, that is not true. Anything else would be surprising, the British being incapable of building

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anything flimsily when it can be well built with the same expenditure of time, labour, and money.

A recently captured and impudent Turkish officer, in conversation one day with the British officer who had him in charge, grew confidentially exultant over the developments that are going on in the country.

' You British,' he said, ' are doing for us in Mesopotamia all the things we want to have done, but probably never would have been able to do for ourselves. At Basra you have built hard-surfaced highways, acres of warehouses, and enough piers and dry-docks to make it one of the best equipped minor ports in the world. Then you have filled in all the lowlands, stamped out malaria, and provided any number of fine hospital buildings that will make excellent barracks one day and serve many other useful purposes.

' You are constructing this end of the Berlin-to-the-Persian-Gulf Railroad and are even building good permanent stations and freight depots all along the line, in which you are graciously pleased to conform to the architectural style of the country.

' Moreover, you have built branch roads here and there which tap big areas of production, and your bridges can meet with nothing but our heartiest approval. Having to import all the materials for them must have cost you something. It was more than we could ever afford.

' Then there are your great power-plants and the whole country lighted up with electricity—to say nothing of telegraph and telephone lines on good steel poles running in every possible direction.

' You have mastered the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of the river Tigris and have filled it with barges and boats of the latest type and pattern ; and now I am told you intend to undertake a great irrigation development for the purpose of putting large areas of desert under cultivation !

' It is marvellous ! You have done more in two years than we have done in all the centuries of our

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sovereignty and more than we probably ever would have done. It's perfectly splendid, really, and the longer it takes Germany to win the war the better off we will be in the end.

'If we had been fighting on your side, poor old Mesopotamia would probably have gone on without any improvements to speak of for perhaps another century. I wouldn't have you driven out for the world. Not yet. Give you another year or two, and you will succeed in restoring all the country's old-time progressiveness and prosperity. Then it will be worth something to the Turkish Empire.'

Queer kind of Turk he was. And he said a lot more than this ; but the officer to whom he was so freely expressing himself, and who repeated the conversation to me, quoted him only in a general way. I wanted to talk with him myself, because the question always in my mind was, 'What do the people think of it all ?' The Arabs, they say, think the British are all quite mad, but the Turks know better than that. They know they are merely industrious and given to doing things in a substantial, methodical, and honest way.

The A.D.C. and I swung round the big circle of war interest in and on the outskirts of Amara, and drew up finally at the entrance to the bazaar. The terrific glare of the midday sun had half-blinded me, so that walking into the dim arcade was at first like walking into utter darkness ; and in the shadowy depths of the bazaar, where the sun never shines, the air was penetratingly chill. It is only in the furious, unendurable heat of midsummer that the invading white tribe—natural sun-lovers—is able fully to understand why the Arabs and their kind choose to live like moles.

In winter they sit in their tiny open cubicles in the bazaars, wrapped in coats and furs, and looking anything but comfortable. In this particular bazaar Abdul-Hamid's vaulting is very high, like the vaulting of a vast cathedral aisle, while in the

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commonplace little booths which line it on either side, one observes a neatness which is evidence enough that the Arab and the Persian can be orderly if they are compelled to be.

Towelling and trinkets; calicoes and cloths; boots and shoes of supposedly Occidental style, and festoons of colourful native footgear; Persian lamb-skins and lambskin garments; hats and helmets, woolly caps and the tasselled *tarboush*; cheap handkerchiefs and mufflers; Kashmir shawls and bright silken things; all these to begin with. Then comes the vegetable section where piles of green things, plentifully sprinkled to keep them fresh, fill the air with musty earth odours. After which the meats. The British have had the meat section screened, and under their constant supervision it is kept spotlessly clean. And the Arab butchers, too, are clean, while they handle the meats with an unnatural nicety that must be a source of endless wonder to the native consumers.

In narrow passages running off at right angles from the main street are the familiar little filthy dens, five feet by six, perhaps, or even smaller, blackened by the soot of tiny forges and littered with nondescript rubbish, where the artists and artisans sit on their heels and ply their various handicrafts.

And not so various, either. There are just three conspicuous occupations. One of them is twisting and ornamenting with silver or silken threads the curious ropes of goats' wool or camels' hair called *agal*, that are used to bind the *kuffiyeh* round the shaggy and shapely heads of Arabs. The second is hammering out the tin and copper utensils of everyday use in Arab households. There are circular deep pans and deeper pots and many small things, but chiefly there are the long-necked, single-handled water-jars which the women—walking majestically, with graceful and evenly measured stride—carry on their shapely shoulders down to

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the wells at the river's brink. These articles are common in Mesopotamia, and probably have been for a millennium or so, but to see them made is to list them in one's mind among things akin to works of art ; and many a British soldier boy has carried home with him an old water-jar to be proudly placed, when he gets it there, among the ornaments on the mantelpiece.

The third industry belongs exclusively to the town of Amara. It is the production by a few individuals of articles of silver inlaid with a black enamel of some kind. It is said that the secret of the art has been handed down to the tribe to which it belongs from the days of the Babylonian Empire, and by way of proof it is pointed out that the articles produced are almost identical in workmanship with articles discovered in the excavation of some of the ancient ruins—notably Babylon. I was told that I really must get a piece of Amara silver as the only unique thing in the way of a souvenir to be found in the country, and I said to myself, ‘ Well, I ’ll just do that.’

But I didn’t. I found the workers at their little black forges turning out nothing but cuff-links and napkin-rings of the most commonplace pattern. Also an occasional bad cigarette-case or a wabbly stemmed egg-cup. They were catering to the British Tommy, and they were doing it with all their dishonest might. They were bent not on delicate artistic endeavour or on keeping up their Babylonish reputation, but solely on robbing the financially reckless white stranger of every penny they could get out of him. And at that they can get all he has without half trying.

Tommy is not a hoarder of the fabulous stipend his country bestows upon him, nor yet of other sums he acquires from other sources. But often enough he is a model of thrift in comparison with his superiors. For a man who knows nothing about the value of a shilling, and cares less, com-

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mend me the average bachelor British army officer, and especially those of the old regular army. When he is on active service the officer has very little opportunity to spend money after his small mess bills are disposed of, so his pay accumulates. And first thing you know he is out looking for some one who will consent to relieve him of it. If he is on a two days' leave in London he is likely to engage the most expensive suite in the finest hotel in town, treat himself to all the millionaire luxuries he can think of, and buy himself fancy raiment.

'And why not?' says he. He may not live to enjoy another two days' leave.

This for the officer fighting in France, of course. In Mesopotamia there is no such thing, alas! as two days' leave in London. But in Mesopotamia there are odds and ends of curious things to buy—mostly Persian—and a goodly store of very mediocre Persian rugs that the collectors have passed by, and the native merchants know that, after a little cheerful haggling for the fun of it, the average British officer will buy these things, and at almost any kind of fantastic price. Why don't they do as the Germans do and just take them, if they want them? Is it not extraordinary that men can be so naïvely, so naturally honourable!

The Arabs in the Amara district are a thieving lot, anyhow, and are distinguished by a good many other low-down characteristics. They are for the most part of the notorious Bani Lam tribe that joined the Turks against the British at the beginning of the war and deserted to the British side as soon as the Turks began to lose. An Englishman, in consequence, would trust one of them about as far as he could throw him. They are cultivators of rice-fields in the marshes a part of the time, but generally they are nomads, living in tents or reed-hut villages, and roaming the desert with small herds of camels, flocks of sheep, and a few horses, donkeys, and buffaloes:

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Among the events to be expected in Amara is an occasional raid, the Arabs being lured by visions of plunder in the form of rifles and ammunition and other army supplies—principally rifles and ammunition. Apparently they have no real wish to kill, but cutting up an outpost or slaying a few sentries may be necessarily incidental to their operations, and of these things they seem to think very lightly. In fact, they bitterly resent the British method of retaliation.

The British always begin by demanding the surrender of the guilty parties, this demand being almost invariably met by a declaration that there are no guilty parties.

Then a flying column marches out and administers what is humorously described as ‘a little injustice.’ That is, they burn a reed-hut village or two, and maybe gather up some plunder on their own account in the form of flocks and herds. It is a cheerful little game, but it is very rapidly losing its popularity among the Arabs. They find sneak-thieving more profitable and less dangerous. And at sneak-thieving they are almost miraculously adept.

I know an officer who had his front teeth stolen. And a good haul it was, too. Three of his teeth had a chance encounter with a bullet one bullet-raining day when he was out in the midst of the storm, and after he got out of hospital with a fine big scar just under his jaw the regimental dentist fixed him up with three perfectly good substitute teeth on a handsome gold plate. He was on a special mission of some kind down the river from Baghdad, and was travelling in a big launch. He reached Amara late one evening, and, having sent his engineer and pilot ashore, decided that he would rig up his own cot and sleep on deck.

He undressed and crawled under the mosquito net, and the last thing he did was to remove that gold plate and place it with the rest of his duffle

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on a chair beside his pillow. Next morning the chair was empty, and he was minus everything he owned except the pyjamas he was wearing, the launch having been stripped of everything, including kit-bags and all its rifles and ammunition. The Arabs, with matchless stealth, had slipped out to the launch in belums, and had got away with the job without making a sound.

The officer was exceedingly thankful that he had not waked up, because, being all alone, if he had made a move of any kind he very likely would have felt the swift slash of a murderous knife across his throat. He didn't mind faring forth in his pyjamas to look for something to wear, but he says he did feel horribly unclothed without his teeth, and, since they don't keep such things in assorted sizes in the general stores, he had to go without them a long time. He felt very strongly that the thieves had not a gentlemanly instinct with which to bless themselves.

There is always a lot of shipping in the river at Amara these days, it being the principal base of supply between Basra and Baghdad, and usually there are one or two monitors lying in against the bank and a 'fly-boat' or two scudding up and down. The 'fly-boats'—so called because each one is named for some kind of stinging insect—are very tiny craft mounting very large guns and seem to afford everybody a vast deal of amusement. It is supposed that there is nothing they can't or won't do.

I think I must record briefly the story of a visit I made to one of the monitors. I had been all over her and had expressed a requisite amount of pleased surprise at her compactness and shining ship-shapeliness, and was talking with a couple of young gunners while I waited for the Commander, who was going with me back to the S-I.

The time was late in the afternoon of a swelteringly hot November Sunday, and I was sitting in a

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canvas chair, leaning against the metal coolness of a desert-yellow gun-turret. At my invitation the gunners had seated themselves—sailor fashion, hugging their knees—on a strip of coir matting on the immaculate deck, the deck being within three feet of the surface of the river, which slipped by rippleless, reflecting in long, slanting, oily streaks the orange-shot lights of a seemingly belated sun that was hurrying down the western sky. The only sounds were the muffled throb of a quiescent engine somewhere, and the squeaks of two pet monkeys that were playing perilously, as it seemed to me, along the low deck-rail forward.

We had been discussing the war in a general kind of way, and had talked in a particular way about how the monitors and ‘fly-boats’ had helped to chase the Turks up the Tigris when General Maude took Baghdad. Their own boat had a few honourable battle scars, of which they were gloriously proud, and there was a story of how, during a hot running fight, the man at the wheel was killed by a bullet that happened to snick through his observation aperture at exactly the right angle to strike him square in the temple.

She was running full speed, head on for a curve in the bank, and was saved from going smash by the captain, who recognised at once by the feel of the deck under his feet that something was wrong, and rushed to the wheel.

After this story there was a thoughtful pause, then :

‘ I ’ve just been thinking,’ said one of the boys, ‘ that if it hadn’t been for Nebuchadnezzar and his wickedness there wouldn’t have been any war, and I ’d be cruisin’ somewhere round old Blighty this very minute.’

‘ Balmy ! Balmy ! ’ murmured the other one.

A pause for apparently deep cogitation. I was waiting. Then :

‘ I say, swing round about forty-five degrees and

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lift a bit, will you ? What d' you think you're shootin' at ?'

' I'm shootin' at what the padre said this morning. Weren't you at the service ? '

' No, it was my watch.'

' Well '—he spoke very slowly and as though he were searching his memory—" he told about how this " land accursed " was once " the granary of the world " ; how the river Tigris was a more generous mother than the Nile, and spread its waters through the greatest system of irrigation that was ever known ; how there was no swamps, and how the thousand and one water-cuts that make the going so hard for our armies nowadays were the canals that carried the water to the land in controlled quantities and made the desert " blossom like a rose." And he said that Nebuchadnezzar was the first king who began to neglect this system, and that his neglect contributed to the downfall of Babylon ; that after the downfall of Babylon things went from bad to worse, with wars and devastation, and all that sort of thing, until the Turks got hold of the country and abandoned it altogether. And now look at it ! '

I thought that whatever the plural of hiatus might be there were a good many of it in his sum-up, but I said nothing. I wanted him to go on. He was a tall, lanky Welshman. His companion was a smaller youth, of rounded but firm contours, who had a shock of unruly straw-coloured hair and a soft Scotch burr in his tongue.

' Interesting if true,' he replied. ' When was Nebuchadnezzar ? ' They both appealed to me with uplifted eyebrows.

' About six hundred B.C., ' I hazarded.

' Twenty-five hundred years ago ! ' exclaimed the smaller one. ' Well, I can get his connection with what 's the matter with this country right enough. But did the padre say he could have prevented this war ? '

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'No, he didn't. I just figured that out for myself.'

'Oh, you did! Well, of course you're wastin' your time on a gunboat—but I'm afraid I don't quite get you.'

'You don't seem to know what this war's about.'

'I do, too! It's "to make the world safe for democracy." ' And he glinted mischievously up at me.

'Well, with all due respect to the great American President, that may be what it's gettin' to be, but that ain't what it was started for. It was started by the Kaiser so he could grab Mesopotamia. And if he had grabbed Mesopotamia he could have gone ahead and grabbed Egypt and India and the whole bally world. We were figurin' it out with a map the other day, and one of the fellows had a book about the Baghdad Railroad. Best thing I ever read on the subject. U-huh! It's easy enough to see that we fellows down here are doin' our bit where it needs doin'.'

'Yes, that's all right, but where does Nebuchadnezzar come in? '

'Oh, that? ' He had nearly lost sight of that. 'That's just a sort of fancy I got. You see, the industrial and commercial possibilities of this country are unlimited. That's what the padre said. It don't look it, but they can prove it by tellin' you what it used to be like and by sayin' it's a mistake to call it a desert. It's a vast alluvial plain! '

'Yes? And Nebuchadnezzar? '

'You're a man without much intelligence, but I'll try to be patient with you. Don't you see that if the country hadn't been neglected, if it had been kept up in what the padre called "all its old-time wealth and prosperity," it would be thickly inhabited now by the kind of people who'd know how to hold it? If that had been the case the Kaiser wouldn't 'av' tried to grab it, India and the rest

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of the world wouldn't 'av' been in danger, and there wouldn't 'av' been any war. Now do you see where Nebuchadnezzar comes in ? ' He joined in the laugh at his own far-fetched fancifulness, then, as though he were a bit embarrassed, but with entire solemnity, he said : ' Of course I know it all goes back a long way before Nebuchadnezzar. If this river wasn't the kind of river it is and this bally country the kind of country it is, Cain probably never would have killed Abel, and then everything would have been different.'

' That's an interesting idea,' I said. ' How do you make that out ? '

' Don't you know how Cain happened to kill Abel ? '

' I know only what the Bible says.'

' Well,' he drawled, ' the Bible 's all right, but it doesn't give natural phenomena its full value.' One could tell he was quoting and being somewhat uncertain about it.

' It was this way : Cain was a farmer and Abel was a herdsman. Don't we see Cains and Abels by the thousands up and down this river ? Abel was better off than Cain, and the neighbours all talked about what a fine chap he was until he got cocky about himself, and Cain got moody and despondent. Abel had his cattle grazing on Cain's land down here on the Tigris somewhere, and the time came when Cain had to turn the water on and get his land ready for crops.

" "Don't you turn any water on that land," Abel said.

" "I 've got to," said Cain, " so please take your cattle away."

" "I will not ! " said Abel.

" "Yes, you will ! " said Cain. Then they got to quarrelling, the way brothers do about things like that, and Cain, all wrought up, anyhow, over not having his sacrifices appreciated, got violent and hit Abel over the head. He didn't mean to kill

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him, and there wouldn't 'av' been much said about it if they hadn't happened to belong to the leading family round here those days.'

Just then the Commander came up through the little round opening at the head of the companion-way, and the gunners sprang to their feet. They controlled their merriment instantly, and were as solemn as owls when they saluted the officer. But I was still laughing as he helped me down into the waiting launch, and I waved a laughing good-bye, at which the gunners grinned and saluted as we started off up-river.

'What were they telling you?' asked the Commander.

'Oh, a number of things. We were discussing the war, and I got some absolutely new ideas.' And I recounted briefly the theory of Nebuchadnezzar's responsibility.

'They certainly are getting to be a lot of unique Bible students,' he laughed. 'And the men of the army are just like them. The padres nearly always hang their sermons on the history of this country, and they make it all so simple and familiar that the boys get interested. They sit around for hours with a Bible and a map and reference-books and work out some of the craziest explanations of things you ever heard. Funny thing is they get all out of focus. They talk about the Flood and things that happened to Abraham and the Prophets as though they were the events of year before last, so, where history is concerned, when they try to focus on anything close up they get cross-eyed. It is most amusing.'

Amusing, yes, but thoroughly comprehensible from my standpoint, because in Mesopotamia I got that way myself.



The scene of the great siege. Kut-el-Amara.



The lone minaret of Kut-el-Amara which miraculously escaped destruction.

CHAPTER XV

FROM AMARA TO KUT-EL-AMARA

ABOVE Amara the great sand-drifts in the river begin, and the navigator begins to prove his qualifications, while he exposes his real character in frequent threats to commit heinous crime. And it was above Amara that the boys began to measure the river's depths and to fill the all-pervading desert silence with their weird cries. There were two of them—one on either side of the bow. They sat on the edge of the railless deck with their feet hanging over, and at intervals of about one minute plunged long plumbing-poles into the water, then lifted their young voices in a curious musical chant, calling the depths. It was a long time before I could make out what they were saying, but that was because I was trying to catch what I supposed were Arabic words. Then I suddenly discovered that they were speaking English.

'Fow-er-fate-a-a-!' in a high-pitched, long-drawn-out melody sounded so little like 'four-feet' that I wondered how the skipper could understand them. But he had no need to understand the words, since he listened only to the sounds they made, their tones changing definitely with every change in the depths.

'Fow-er-fate-a-a-!' The man on the port bow flourished it in a dozen mellifluous tenor notes, while the man to starboard answered with a shorter, sharper, more positive cry that had in it a sound of confirmation. But it was not always four feet or any other depth on both sides of the boat at the same time.

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‘Five-a-fate-a-a !’ the man on the port might call out, to be answered from starboard by a doleful warning.

‘Two-a-fate !’

Then Yukon—always on the bridge for ‘the ticklish bits’—would jerk the engine-room signal to the half-speed indicator and frantically whirl the big wheel to point the boat’s prow to port. But as often as not we were just an instant too late and zhr-r-o-og ! we would go into it. It’s a horrible sensation, grounding on a sand-bar !

Yukon had a very amusing trick which required quick action and considerable skill. If he wasn’t ‘in too Dutch,’ as he expressed it, he would reverse the paddle, churn up a big forward wave, and glide over on it, and his grin of triumph when he succeeded in doing this was worth living to see. We had to struggle a number of times, but we never had to call for a patrol tug, and in consequence we were able to pass a few less fortunate or less skilfully handled boats with an air of lofty disdain. All of which is mere brief illustration of some of the daily and commonplace difficulties.

The serene hours were those we spent on broad and sufficiently deep reaches of the river, when the boys with the plumbing-poles sat and chanted back and forth a never varying call in their own language.

‘*Ba’-hut pani*,’ is what they said, and it means literally ‘plenty of water.’ They never began to sing ‘*Ba’-hut pani*’ until they could no longer touch bottom, but the suddenness with which we struck shallows or sand-drifts proved the tremendous treachery of the river and the necessity for ceaseless vigilance. Among my memories of the Tigris I shall always retain the melody of that low chant, ‘*Ba-a’-hut pa-nee-e-e !*’ ending in a long, sweet, lingering note and being answered by, ‘*Ba-a’-hut pa-nee !*’ in a lower but no less musical key; the mingled sounds banking in against the high shelv-

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ing ledges of current-cut clay on either side and spreading out over the surfaces of the slow, still river in ever-receding, ever-renewed waves of lone-some-sounding music.

Just before we reached Kut-el-Amara we came to the battle-field of Sunnaiyat, one of the ghastliest of all the historic fields of Mesopotamia. For my benefit we banked in and went ashore. I had heard the fearful tales, and I wanted to see the fearful setting of them. I climbed the camel-thorny slope of the high Bund, and stood for a moment gazing across the far-flung network of crumbling, shell-riven trenches. That is all Sunnaiyat now is. All—except that the trenches are filled with dead men's bones. Sunnaiyat—the name of a waste place where men have suffered as men have suffered on few other spots on earth—even in this war.

Within hearing distance of Kut, the men besieged at Kut listened to the thunder of the guns of Sunnaiyat for weeks on end—and with what prayerful hope who has the power to imagine? And it was at Sunnaiyat that the Turks made their last desperate stand against General Maude's victorious army in February 1917, the three days' battle that raged then over the already blood-drenched and historic ground being one of the fiercest and costliest fights of the whole campaign.

This was the fourth battle of Sunnaiyat, the first three having been fought in April 1916, during the course of the last tremendous effort the British made to relieve General Townshend.

It was high noon when we landed, and the sun, searching through thick sweaters and coats, burnt one's skin with a dry, prickly burning, while the wind blew penetratively chill across the mournful waste. And I was glad of the healthy discomfort because my flesh crept with the horror of the things I saw and the things my mind was forced to visualise. The Arabs have always searched and

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looted the battle-fields—and they do not rebury the dead !

I have been on many battle-fields before—in France, in Serbia, in Belgium. But they were battle-fields eloquent of living love ; clothed for the most part with green things and having white crosses hung with immortelles to mark the graves of the fallen who were buried where they fell. They seemed, those battle-fields, as thresholds between suffering faith and triumphant realisation, and I remembered thinking in the scarred but sweet green fields of French Lorraine, that I might lie down with my ear against the wholesome earth and hear God's heart beat.

But Sunnaiyat, in Mesopotamia—land of ancient battles and Cradle of the World—Sunnaiyat is gashed and ghastly, naked and piteously ashamed. To have marked the resting-places of the dead on this or on any other remote field of heroism in this unholy land would have been only to invite an even more hideous outrage. So trenches were filled and great levels were made, and one can only thank God that the British graves are left practically undisturbed.

Yet, one wants to cover the bones of the Turkish dead, too. One wants to say to them : ‘ Rest in Peace ! Boys of a people at war with invincible human right, you fought for the triumph of your own beliefs, or as you were commanded to fight ; as it was given to you to win your badges of heroism, you have won. Rest in Peace ! ’

Out on the edge of the intrenchments there were creeping figures bent over in eager search of the sacred ground. Arab ghouls ! Not yet satisfied after so many months ? No, not yet satisfied. They would pick up something and gather in an eager group to examine it in the sunlight. Nothing. They would toss it aside and go on creeping—creeping. . . .

I wonder how many of them had tossed aside the

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precious thing I found. It was lying near the entrance of a British trench—an old leather bayonet-scabbard all burned and blackened at the end, as though some one had been poking a fire with it. And of course some one had. Some blessed Tommy, perhaps coaxing the coals under his supper while shells whistled over his head. He had either died or he had thrown it aside in a rush to meet the enemy hand to hand. So much of this fighting was hand to hand.

I stood and pondered over the old scabbard, looking at it and then at the fearful scene around us. And in my mind I saw two boys ; one—still in the ranks fighting the great fight ; the other—his head held high in the shining column of the Forever Beloved host. Which of them threw the scabbard away ?

The British held this position from the first disastrous attempt to relieve General Townshend until near the end of the campaign which culminated in the capture of Baghdad, and for sheer horror and unmitigated hardship nothing could possibly surpass the thing they lived through.

The men engaged, already worn with battle, were compelled to hold on week after week without hope of respite or relief. And there was not so much as a blade of grass for them to rest their eyes upon ; only the terrible desert under a pitiless burning sun. They were hemmed in by the river on one side, and on the other by a vast marsh which, when the wind was right, had a mystifying habit of moving in on the position and flooding everything, that being one of the peculiar habits of the marshes that I have spoken of. They literally do blow about the desert, spreading with terrifying rapidity even before a light wind if it is steady enough. So a company might be intrenched in comparative comfort one hour in a position where it would be in danger of drowning the next, and with never a drop of rain to clear the air of the blinding, choking,

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torturing clouds of fine dust that the desert winds always carry before them.

Nobody can tell me that the men who have fought in Mesopotamia do not deserve some special kind of recognition—which they never will get !

Leaving the British position, we walked a long way across the one-time No Man's Land—now a tangle of rubbish and rust-blackened barbed wire—and came up on the Turkish parapets. And there I saw evidence enough that the Arabs bestow their ghoulish attentions chiefly upon the Turkish dead. It is not thought that this is because the British are more respected. It is only that more of value is to be found in the Turkish graves. The British search the bodies of their own dead before they bury them. This is done on order and for what are officially listed as ‘objects of sentimental value,’ all such objects being returned to the family of the fallen man. But the British do not search the bodies of enemy dead, and in their final victorious advance over this field it fell to their lot to bury hundreds of them.

So one finds a fearful story written in the tragic gullies of the Turkish position. No need to write it out. Heaps of mouldering soldier clothes and dead men's bones scattered and kicked about ! Such things cause waves of shuddering nausea to sweep over the normal living human.

Yet the British have buried and reburied the dead on the field of Sunnaiyat. They have punished the Arabs and have pleaded with them. But it is an isolated field. It is far away from any connection with things as they are to-day, and there is not a human habitation within many miles of it, unless it be an Arabs' tented encampment in the desert.

I was glad enough to trudge back as quickly as possible across the miles of gashed and ghastly waste, to get back aboard our peaceful old boat, and to let myself rest in a deep deck-chair while

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the depth-measurers filled the evening with the monotonous sweet melody of '*Ba'hut pani!*'

And perhaps I should not try to write about a sunset. But when all is said it is nothing but the divine intoxication of the Mesopotamian evening lights that gets into one's blood and creates in one's inner consciousness an impression that, after all, Mesopotamia is a land to love.

The desert is horizon-wide ; it is dotted here and there with the black goatskin tents of Bedouin encampments, and is filled with slanting sun-rays that turn all the hollows into lakes of mauve, and all the knolls and high places into points of flame-shot amber. The sky and the broad reflecting ribbon of the Tigris are all wonderful orange, deepened by low-hanging clouds that are blue with the blue of the sapphire, and are outlined with narrow fringes of glinting gold. The light of a pallid young moon makes its way into the swiftly gathering shadows, to lie presently down the length of the moveless coppery river in a band of palest yellow.

Colours ! I never saw such colours ! And in the path of moonlight, with the sunset lights still glowing on the edges of the darkening plain, a great high-hulled and tall-masted mahayla swings round a bend, its broad brown sail softly bellied by the almost imperceptible breeze.

Then : '*Ba-a'-hut pa-nee-e-e ! Ba-a'-hut pa-nee !*' Creeping sweet echoes—and the far-away, heart-chilling shrieks of a thousand jackals greeting the night wherein they range the boundless reaches of fearful desolation.

In the last light of that amazingly finished day we saw for the first time the —th Regiment of Cavalry that left Basra on the long trail to the front two days before we started. And it was a thrilling thing to see. In a final burst of energy after the day's weary march they swept up to the marching-post on the river-bank in a wide-curving

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column of fours which stretched away into the distance in a low bank of fine desert dust that floated off like a mist cloud in the moonlight. And behind them lay a last streak of orange against the desert's edge, the sky above them a pearly grey in which one great star shone. What a picture !

We watched them from the bridge until we rounded a wide bend in the river and could see them no longer ; then the cheerful sounds they made in their methodical preparations for the night followed us a long way in the wonderful silence.

CHAPTER XVI

A NEW KUT

THE Mesopotamian war zone is far away from the great centres of war and intense world-interest, and subsequent tremendous events elsewhere have made the days of Townshend and his unyielding small army seem remote.

But on the river Tigris—its bed metalled with shot and shell and strewn with the debris of war—one remembers those days with compelling vividness and attaches to them their just measure of importance.

Mesopotamia is a sacred land. It is sacred to some of the strongest nations and the greatest religious sects on earth. It is a land wherein the voices of the deities of many peoples have been heard. It is filled with shrines and sacred cities. It is a land of devout pilgrimage.

And Kut-el-Amara, I think, will always be sacred to the British. At Kut their pride was crucified, and at Kut their pride was eventually redeemed and rose triumphant, a shining thing which shines in Mesopotamia to-day in the finest demonstration of high morality and right purpose that I have ever seen.

The first thing one observes on approaching Kut from the south is a tall obelisk. It stands out in the general scene, rising in the centre of things on the peninsula that is formed by a great bend in the river and on which the town of Kut is built. The obelisk was raised by the Turks to commemorate the surrender of General Townshend and their victory over the British forces that had tried so long

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and so heroically to relieve him. When I saw it from far down the river I asked :

‘ What is the monument ? ’

They told me. And it became at once to me as an exclamation point to punctuate my own astonishment !

Was ever anything quite so premature ? It makes one realise as nothing else could how confident the Turks and the Germans were that they had the British in Mesopotamia permanently defeated.

Defeated ! It is incredible that any one could have imagined it ! In the face of things as they have become that obelisk seems to me to express a kind of whimpering entreaty, as though it felt itself strangely inappropriate and would get away if it could follow its builders on the long trail of retreat to the north. It is a monument to monumental misconception, the ironic humour of it being unique and a thing in which Englishmen may now rejoice.

KUT-EL-AMARA !

But first comes new Kut, and we stop there. It is another busy base of supply and transport activities, a main junction in the vast veinage of communication with the front and, to my mind, at least, the most interesting of them all.

When we arrived at Kut we drew in against the bank and made of ourselves an instantly interesting addition to the conglomerate scene along the river-front. Interesting we always were, of course ; it being in the nature of things that the arrival of the Inspector-General of Communications should be regarded as somewhat of an event. Having just returned from a trip to India, it was six weeks or more since he had been up the river, and there was much to make long conferences a necessity. The

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base commandant and a number of other officers came down to the river-bank to greet us, and the General, accompanied by the Major, was soon off to base headquarters for the inevitable consultation.

By that time, having come all the way up the Tigris at the rate of about six miles an hour, travelling most of the way by daylight and stopping everywhere, the work of war as it is carried on behind an army on active service had ceased to bewilder and astound me. It had not become commonplace and uninteresting by any means. Quite the contrary; it continued to enthrall me absolutely.

But it was as though there never had been and never could be any other kind of work in the world, and I had come to a point where I could witness its immensities without expressing the emotions that arose in me altogether in terms of exclamation.

They told me that Qurnah was the worst place on the river, and Amara the best, and the spirit of local jealousy and pride with which such claims are made and maintained is a most amusing thing. The British soldier stationed at Qurnah boastfully enumerates its horrors—and the wonders he performs in their midst; while men of Amara dwell at length upon the superior advantages of their post—advantages that could never get themselves so listed if there were no such horrors as Qurnah's in the near vicinity with which to compare them. Whatever Qurnah and Amara may be, I decided for myself that Kut—new Kut, that is—exceeded them both in dust and dreariness, and in its incessant rumble and rush of toilsome industry. Kut is the last base behind the advanced base, which is located far up the river, and is connected by branch railways with the outposts of supply behind the wide-curving line of defence round Baghdad.

It surely would surprise Khalil Pasha and his Turkish legions if they could see this place now.

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It stretches along the grimly historic river-bank, covering an area that was a No Man's Land during the long siege—a No Man's Land lying under the guns of General Townshend's hemmed-in but valiant and defiant little army ; and it has a population of hardly ever less than twenty thousand.

True, it is for the most part a city of tents—and an amazing sight it is ! And true, the inhabitants are mostly coolie labourers of every nationality on earth that produces coolie labour ; but in addition to the acres upon acres of tents there are long streets of fine hospital huts and many good permanent buildings for railway offices, construction and repair shops, engine-houses, and working quarters generally.

The permanent structures are all built or are being built to type, with a view to future necessities and the development of a real town. The impudent prisoner must have had Kut in mind when he referred to British building plans as conforming to the architectural style of the country. But how would he expect Englishmen to build ?

To the mind of the interested observer their manner of doing things suggests thoughts of a possible future Peace Conference and leads to speculations as to what may be the fate of poor old Mesopotamia as a pawn on the international chess-board. But the men who are doing the work seem to concern themselves very little with such speculations, though they may have faith that at the war's end such principles will prevail as will make the greatest good of the greatest number in every country the predominant consideration.

They are interested chiefly, I think, in the effect they hope to produce on the viewpoints and dispositions of the native populations. They are all anxious to do what they can, while the opportunity lasts, by way of humanising and civilising the Arab, and every change for the better which they observe in his attitude they regard as so much gained

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for the general good. They are bent on showing him such fleshpots of Egypt as will tempt him to sustained industrial effort, and at the same time they are training him in righteous governmental methods. When the profits and losses of the war shall come to be added up and apportioned to the various countries involved it will be found that Mesopotamia, regardless of what her eventual fate may be, will have benefited immeasurably. And so much for British occupation !

The electric power-house at Kut is as yet only a corrugated tin shed, but out of that shed run many wires which branch off and spread out all over the great area, carrying current to hundreds of high arc-lights which sputter and spurt, collect clouds of insects—which might otherwise be more pestiferously engaged—and turn darkness into something very much better than the noonday glare. And at Kut, as at Basra and Amara and other important points along the river, the working-day—in some branches, at least, of the multiple enterprise of war—is twenty-four hours long.

We had pulled in alongside a wide cut in the steep bank through which automobiles and other vehicles are landed from boats when the river is low, and the A.D.C. and I, climbing up the long incline into the glare and the mysterious shadows of the night, went wandering.

The dust was literally ankle-deep, but one learns to pay no attention to that sort of thing. It is one of the principal duties of every personal servant in Mesopot to keep a plentiful supply of cleaned boots on hand for his employer and to be always ready to take advantage of any opportunity that may present itself to clean said employer up a little with brushes and polishing-cloths.

The wily and soft-spoken Ezekiel always made a great to-do over brushing me, and invariably tried to manoeuvre me out into a bright white light some-

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where so that everybody would be able to observe his excellence and humble devotion. Lilwa, the Major's boy, was for ever sitting in some conspicuous spot on the deck, brooding over a row of high military boots—polishing them with loving care until he could see his own smileless face in them; while the General's gentle slave simply followed him around.

One of the usual sights to be seen on the S-1 was the great, gruff Major-General standing in deep consultation with a group of other officers—on matters of serious moment, no doubt—while his boy sprawled at his feet, plying oily flannels and whisk broom on dusty boots and breeches. The General would walk off, apparently unconscious of the boy's existence, but the boy always ran after him for a final whisk or vigorous rub, then lounged lazily back to other work, muttering to himself. About the uselessness of his affectionate care? Probably. He always knew the General sahib would be back in a short time, dustier than ever. Everybody was always dusty, and, as I have said, nobody ever paid any attention to it.

The A.D.C. and I had just time to make a round of the works before changing for dinner. We walked round a dozen young pyramids of hay and sacked grain, out to the railway sheds and sidings, where hundreds of labourers were filling cars with supplies for advanced base and the front, and where a fine new hospital train was just having its precious load transferred to stretchers and motor ambulances; through the engine-houses and workshops; past long rows of hospital tents, against the canvas sides of which soft lights gleamed palely; to the railway station farther up the line, where we glimpsed through the windows khaki-clad boys bending over telegraph instruments; out round remount and mule depots and the veterinary hospital; to the river-bank, where lines of coolies laden with sacks and boxes were coming and going

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in unbroken procession, loading barges for up-river and transferring the cargo of other barges to the big orderly supply-dumps over by the railway sidings ; up to the power-house, where the dynamos were humming and the garish green lights were shining ; and so to the high Bund by our own river landing, where we stood for a while to watch an artillery convoy getting under way for the front.

There were many screaming mules, whinnying horses, and men barking low-toned orders and moving with the precision of inspection drill. The wide dusty field was packed close with orderly rows of guns, munitions- and kit-wagons, ambulances, and all the paraphernalia of an artillery regiment on the march.

And with what an inspiring rattle and clank the swift, methodical business was accomplished ! Four mules to a caisson, they were brought up in their jingling harnesses, snapped into their places, their riders were in the saddles, and they were trotting off to join the long column trailing out through the dust-laden electric glare and on into the dim moonlit desert gloom beyond before one had time more than to glance at them.

We hurried back aboard then, to get ready for a dinner-party. And this reminds me that there was just one thing I wanted in Mesopotamia that I did not have sufficient assurance to ask for—I wanted a temporary suspension of the regulation that forbids nursing sisters to dine out.

At the various base headquarters, at naval headquarters, on gunboats, at interesting officers' messes—everywhere that hospitality could possibly be dispensed—I dined as the guest of the most altogether delightful hosts I ever encountered anywhere. And though I made considerable progress in the gentle art of acting as though being the only woman in a world inhabited solely by men was what I had been brought up from my youth to regard as the only desirable fate for me, I did wish

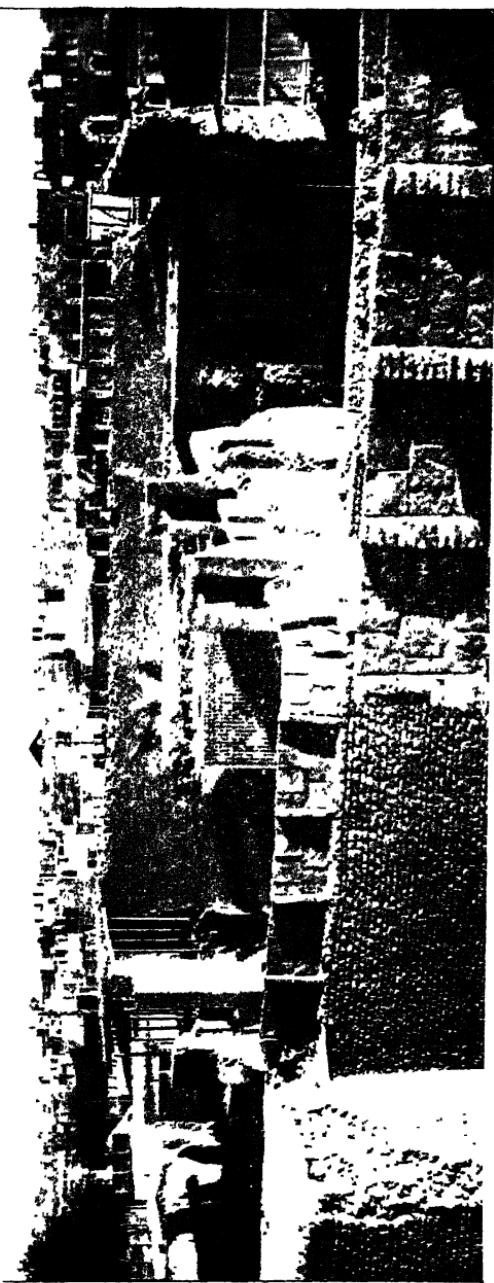
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sometimes for at least one other representative of my kind—even if she had to be a rule-making supervisor. But, no !

The rule which forbids nursing sisters to dine with officers can be broken in only one way. Once in a great while an officer invites some sisters to dinner and calls it High Tea—with capital letters. On such an occasion sisters have been known to linger in an officers' mess as late as nine o'clock. But no man with less rank than a Major-General would dare make himself responsible for such an unseemly irregularity, and base commandants are only colonels, sometimes even majors. So at Kut it was not High Tea and there were no nursing sisters. Aside from the sisters, you understand, I was the only woman in existence on the River Tigris.

My dinner-parties were all memorable events, but the one at Kut was, I think, especially memorable. The commandant's mess is in a building which is like a hospital hut about two-thirds buried. That is, it is built on the general plan of a hospital hut, but is sunk about eight feet in the ground. This style of temporary structure is cooler in the summer than any other, but the early dinner conversation was largely about how scorpions—and other poisonous creeping creatures—found it such an easy house to get into that they made it a kind of rendezvous. My chair had no rungs for me to hook my heels on, so I just had to sit and suffer. Scorpions are much too numerous in the desert wastes. And they creep round regardless, you know, having no respect at all for human beings. They have no intelligence. It was rather awful !

The dust, too, rolled in without encountering any obstacles. It came down the sloping cuts in the earth to the open windows in rills and runnels and swirling clouds, as though it had just discovered a hole in the ground which it must make haste to fill



Deliberate destruction in Baghdad

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up, and with it would have come clouds of little stinging sand-flies if it had been the sand-fly season.

'Can't you find a better place than this to build a town?' I asked.

A better place? No! It was an ideal spot! A wonderful country lay all round about!

Wonderful? Why, it was the bleakest, loneliest, most dismal stretch of desert that ever seared human eyesight. It had been making my soul ache the whole afternoon—ever since I had looked out across it in the brazen glare of midday from the naked trenches of the battle-field of Sunnaiyat. It is a land accursed—the land of Babylonia. 'Because of the wrath of the Lord it shall not be inhabited, but it shall be wholly desolate.' Thus saith the Lord of hosts.

But where the blood of the Briton is poured out there the earth brings forth rich harvests. Behold you any spot under the sun where the blood of the Briton has been shed, and deny that!

Besides, there is such a thing as modern irrigation. Whether or not it has anything on ancient irrigation is very doubtful, but it is the thing we know. The ancients knew the art of conveying water to the land, and the land of Mesopotamia is seamed to-day with ditches that were made when the world was young. Mesopotamia was once the granary of the world. It can be made again the granary of the world; and Kut, the sacred city of the longest and bitterest siege of the greatest and the cruelest war, lies on the direct highway of the world's future development. From Kut the ways run out—caravan routes now, but to be tremendous railroads in your time and mine—to tap Persia and the splendid treasure world of Central Asia beyond. Mind you, this is not my talk; it is the talk of the dinner-table.

Then there are the Arabs, children of Ishmael; it is time the curse of the Lord were lifted from them; time that Abraham, from wherever he keeps

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his bosom, should cease to be able to recognise them at a glance. What are we fighting for to-day but to lift the ancient curses from the children of men—the curses not only of arrogance and inhuman greed, but the curses as well of ignorance and poverty, and the sins begot of those always coupled sins ?

‘ Oh, but really—’

‘ Well, never mind ! We haven’t licked the Huns yet, but with the United States with us—God ! I wish I had a hundred years to live ! ’

They were always being nice like that, making me feel that it was quite all right to be an American. And I suppose I never should have noticed it if it had not been for a few former experiences. During the first two and a half years of the war I travelled in nearly all the Allied countries as a more or less, and rightly, despised neutral ; and always a suffering neutral—because I myself have never known a neutral hour since the first German gun was fired across the Belgian frontier.

When an Englishman in those days pronounced the word ‘ American ’ with—what should one say—a difference ?—I could only feel sorry. It never made me angry because from the outset I had to recognise that my country had failed to fall in line in the greatest struggle for the betterment of all men that humanity has ever witnessed. Much of the time I was close up, you see, and close up one loses sight of everything but the fact that the war on the Allied side is and always has been an almighty defence of great principles that are the rightful heritage of us all !

For an American it is different now. And how the wonderful difference makes a once heavy American heart lift !

The padre sat next to me, a handsome and charmingly vehement young divine, who could utter maledictions and prophesy world strides in the way of right with a nicety of diction and a soft-voiced

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nonchalance of drawingl fervour that were almost enough to make me forget the creeping creatures.

'The United States with us !' Is there an American or Englishman anywhere who fails to understand what that means ? We are coming surely into the benefits of our own, and our own has always been blood brotherhood. We have everything in common—laws, language, literature, ideals of governmental morality—generally lived up to and always stoutly proclaimed—and bulldog jaws. We are the only two peoples on earth that can make a matched team. And it is our destiny together to defend all that the world has achieved, that the world's conscience approves.

And France ! But France—is France ! And is it not strange that France is always depicted as a woman ? A goddess of all the high liberties of mind and soul ! And on either side of her in all the pictures that express the thoughts of men stand Uncle Sam and old John Bull !

Dinner-table conversations ? Yes, of course. One American woman and about ten British army officers in a desert dug-out in the Cradle of the World.

Then we had a geography lesson. Nearly all the British officers I met in India and Mesopotamia are making plans to go home *via* the United States when the war is over.

Heretofore they have taken the shortest route, *via* the Mediterranean to Marseilles, and then the fastest express to Calais or Boulogne. But they want to see the United States *now*. They are interested. I have mapped out routes for any number of them, enjoying to the utmost their abysmal ignorance of American geography.

One young officer, who holds an Oxford degree, and is exceedingly learned in his line, 'lowed as how Washington City was in the state of Virginia. Which was a close enough guess, and proved that at some time in his life he had occasion to glance

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at a map of my country. I asked him what he thought the D.C. stood for, but he had never thought of that. When I explained it to him he said he thought it was deuced clever of our old boys to fix it that way.

'Just stands off by itself and belongs as much to one state as to another, eh ? Long heads those British fathers of your country had.'

'Yes, hadn't they ! What state is Kansas City in ?'

'Kansas, of course. I say, I know something about the United States !'

'Yes, I see you do. What state is St. Louis in ?'

'Well, I don't know everything.' Then he switched the cut. 'Which is the smallest county in England ?' he asked.

'Good Heavens ! Has England a smallest county ? How dreadful !'

I have sent them all a zigzag course across the United States. I have regretted the necessity for cutting out the great North-West, but there is a supreme thrill in the Grand Cañon of the Colorado, so I have sent them that way, *via* southern California, then up to Denver, and on to Omaha, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Albany, and down the Hudson to New York. Then I have recommended side trips to Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and the Virginia of their romances and most accurate knowledge.

Going still farther, I have advised a return *via* the United States—instead of wasting time through the Mediterranean and the familiar Suez—and a cut out through the North-West to Seattle, or a trip down through the sweet South to New Orleans and on across the great state of Texas. It bewilders them utterly. And they usually ask if our railroads give tickets away to nice, penniless British army officers who are anxious to learn. One thinks they might.

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The padre walked with me back to our boat-landing, and he gave me some bullets that the Turks shot into Kut during the siege. They are a rare kind of souvenir, but I will say for them that they look more or less like—just bullets. And considering what the siege was, there must be millions of them somewhere.

He told me it was against the regulations to give such things away to be carried out of the country—he didn't know why—but I suppose a sufficiently popular padre can break almost any kind of regulation.

One of the base commandants gave me a beautiful brass shell-case that was shot across the Shatt-el-Hai when General Maude was hammering his way to Baghdad. And now that I have gone and told about it, I suppose he will get hanged, poor man! If he does I shall be very sorry, because he was just about the nicest and genialest old colonel I ever met. He knew he was committing a crime, but I did all I could to convince him that it was justifiable.

There was a nearly full moon high overhead in a fleckless sky; the bluish arc-lights sputtered and flashed on their tall steel poles, and the scene was shadowed and alive with the figures of men moving in long lines, laden or free, to and from the river-bank, where numbers of steamboats and mahaylas lay. In the wonderful night silence an occasional murmur floated to one's ears, and from afar off came the wild call of the desert jackals.

We met two nursing sisters coming out of their hut quarters, and stopped to talk with them. They began at first to rail at 'Trixie,' the incomparable general supervisor, but thought better of it, and, after the usual gamut of unthrilling pleasantries, ended by wishing to goodness they could get the fearful dust out of their hair. They were on the way to night duty in the great hospital of tents that lay off at the edge of the encampment.

A queer world to live in—the war-time Mesopotamian world!

CHAPTER XVII

THE SCENE OF THE TERRIBLE SIEGE

IT was late in the afternoon of another day that the A.D.C. and I took the base commandant's launch and went up-river to old Kut. The obelisk of Turkish victory shone palely yellow in the sunlight, and the date-palms, sheltering the town and fringing the river-banks, gleamed silvery green under their coating of fine desert dust. It was not until we rounded a wide bend that the town came into view, and I approached it with a strangely tight feeling round my heart—in reverent mood.

We climbed the high bank and came up into the open space that lies along the river-front of the curious old town, and I felt as I think a man must feel when he involuntarily removes his hat.

This plaza-like area is being made to grow grass now, and some day, if British influence continues to predominate, it will be a beautiful park filled with palms and shrubs and flowering things, where the people will walk and rest in the quiet and the cool of evening while they watch the desert sunsets across the wide, still river.

But the men of Townshend's army will always remember that during the siege no one dared to venture on that river-front, even to go down to the bank for water. It lay under the guns of the enemy on the other side, and was within easy sniping reach.

They will also remember, perhaps, that the first thing they saw on it, and the last, was a gallows.

Before the British captured the town in 1915

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the Turks kept a gibbet there for the benefit of doubtful Arabs, and after General Townshend's capitulation their initial act in the establishment of their control was the erection of a new one, on which they summarily hanged a number of Arabs who had made the terrible mistake of believing that the British force would be relieved.

Our launch pilot led the way for us into the town and through an intricate maze of narrow streets to the house of the resident commandant, an officer whose administrative function is purely civil, nothing of a military character being permitted now to touch old Kut at any point.

His name is Captain Wilson, and he belonged to General Townshend's army. His regiment went through the siege and into captivity, but he was among the casualties of the battle of Ctesiphon and happened to be in one of the boat-loads of wounded that got away down-river while the retreat was in progress.

He speaks Arabic and seems to be eminently fitted for his job, which is to restore Kut, to receive and resettle in their homes the returning inhabitants, and to administer their numerous and tremendously disturbed affairs. It is not an easy billet, but, thanks to the young man's industry and capacity for organisation, coupled with the support of the generally benevolent British intention, it is getting easier all the time.

The town, of course, was literally shot to pieces, there being large areas that were nothing but piles of broken brick and dusty rubbish. A house here and there may have come through in fairly good condition, but I saw none that bore no marks of shot and shell.

We found Captain Wilson at headquarters—the same house General Townshend used as headquarters during the siege. And I really ought to write that in such a way that I could use an exclamation point by way of emphasis. There is an

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exclamation point in my mind, and there was when I walked up to that historic door. I stopped a moment outside it, while in a flash of visions I saw—many things ! I am not given so particularly to thrills, but the living white man or woman who could enter that doorway without a lift of the heart is carrying round for a heart a lump of something wholly without vibrant quality.

It is the usual four-square Arab house with the second-floor rooms opening on to a narrow balcony that hangs over a brick-paved inner court. The first thing the commandant did was to apologise smilingly for the general dilapidation. The whole court was a wreck. The walls were nicked and chipped, the balcony rails were broken, and there was not a piece of glass left intact that was as large as the palm of one's hand.

'We have not yet begun to bring in window-glass,' he said. 'It is not a necessity, you see, and we are not yet dealing in anything but necessities.'

Not a necessity ? I was not so sure about that. There is a short but rather bitter winter in Mesopotamia, and it was coming on apace. It was cold enough even then. The captain, at work in the underground room that had been General Townshend's office, sat at his desk with an overcoat on, while out in the court a crowd of Arabs shivered and hugged themselves for warmth, with their hands thrust up the wide sleeves of their thin burnouses.

They were waiting to interview their British *wali*, or governor ; their father, friend, boss—everything. That is what the commandant has to be. And each of them would prayerfully present a claim or petition of some kind, which it might or might not be possible for him to meet or grant. He would do his best. A friendly and satisfied Arab is a better citizen than an Arab with a grievance.

As we came out into the court he quickly explained my presence, saying that he intended to

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escort me round the town and out to the battle-lines. They must either wait for him a while longer or go away and come back again next morning.

They looked at me with grave curiosity and seemed quite cheerful about being put off. All but one. He followed us out and down the long, narrow street, coming up beside the captain and talking to him rapidly in a low, insistent tone. I was surprised at the patience with which the captain listened, and when he answered the man threw his shoulders back with a smile of satisfaction, then, with a low salaam, turned and rejoined his companions.

‘What is his particular variety of trouble?’ asked the A.D.C.

‘Oh, a dispute about one of the old gates. I fancy it belongs to him all right. He’s only been back a few days.’

‘What old gates?’ I asked.

‘Some our chaps saved. There were a number of fine ancient doors and gates—carved and nail-studded and copper-bound and that sort of thing—and they didn’t like to see them destroyed. So they took them down and put them in a safe place. Some of the men who were exchanged knew where they were—in a hole in the ground—and we are putting them back now.’

Quite matter-of-factly he offered this small contribution to history. I laughed with a kind of heartaching joy.

‘But I thought there was a fuel famine, among other things, and that they burned everything fire would consume!’ I answered.

‘Oh yes, so there was and so they did. But they couldn’t burn that kind of thing, could they?’

A great many Englishmen would have added, ‘We’re not Huns or Vandals, you know!’ But he didn’t.

I saw one of the old doors a few moments later. It was dignifying the patched-up ruins of a mud-

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and-reed-mat house ; a fine thing in a curious setting. Likely as not it dated from the days of the Kaliphs of Baghdad.

But imagine, if you can, such sentiment in the minds of men besieged. They burned their own hospital huts and all their vehicles. A packing-box or ammunition-crate was the most precious thing in the world, and when a house was brought down by a bomb or shell its few timbers and laths were regarded as a godsend. Fuel was exhausted long before food began to run short ; they were besieged through the winter months—from the 7th of December until the end of April—but nobody thought of requiring physical comfort. They needed fuel for their mess fires.

They began eventually to eat their mules and horses, and the raw flesh. . . . They had practically no fuel at all, and C. B., a medical officer who went through the siege and who has written such an illuminating and inestimably valuable account of it from a medical officer's standpoint, tells about how they found one day some old Turkish bread which, being unfit for human consumption, was yet priceless, because it would burn. They burned it, and were very sorry afterwards when they began to realise that the phrase 'unfit for human consumption' is unlimitedly comparative.

The bazaar and the *serais* of old Kut skirt the plaza which lies along the river-front, and they were riddled by shot and shell. Because the life of an Arab town is centred in its bazaars, the first important thing to be undertaken was the rebuilding of the long arcade and the restoration of the vaulted streets, which are lined with small booths for the accommodation of the merchants. This is finished now, or nearly so, and life has begun to resume its normal course—with the big city of war an easy walk down the river-bank to contribute to its intensity and interest.

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The reconstruction is all done with materials sifted out of the crumbling ruins, and advantage is taken of the opportunity to widen the streets and to build with improved sanitary conditions always in view. It is all very fine, and one warmly approves the right-minded ambition that inspires the builders ; but, save for its too evident newness, it will be difficult soon to realise that Kut was ever the scene of an unparalleled torture of men and a town laid waste.

On the way out to the lines of defence we passed through a still untouched section of ruin and rubbish, and stopped in open spaces here and there to examine the pitiful holes in the ground where the men lived most of the time to escape the peril of constant bombardment and the too frequent bombing from the air.

Along toward the end of the siege they began not to bother much about moving round or even about relieving one another in the trenches. One place was as good as another as far as comfort and safety were concerned, and the men in the front lines simply stayed where they were. They could hold guns to the end and defend the position, but they were too weak to walk back the length of the peninsula to the rear lines.

For weeks they had just sufficient food to sustain life, and it is told of them that they chewed the ends of their fingers until they bled and became very sore.

Horrible ? Yes. But it is also told of them by comrades, who were sent back after the surrender in exchange for Turkish prisoners, that not one of them ever whimpered or complained. Not once did any man, Indian or Englishman, voice a desire to do anything but hold on and hold on. They had sublime faith that the relief force—the music of whose guns thrilled in their ears day after day—would succeed ; and General Townshend was the courageous hero of their utmost idolatry.

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When we came in from the tragic lines of defence, dominated now by the Turkish obelisk of victory, we turned into the cemetery which lies at the edge of the town, with the wide waste of the desert stretching out to the eastward beyond it.

And what a cemetery ! It is surrounded by a new mud wall that the commandant has built, and there are a few drooping, tired-looking, transplanted palm-trees hanging over the graves. But I looked across it and wondered what it was that I missed. The dreadful nakedness of it hurt me, yet I did not grasp at the moment what it was that gave me an impression of dreadful nakedness. Then I realised.

‘The graves are not marked !’ I said.

‘No,’ answered the commandant.

There was a long pause then, during which the three of us—the A.D.C., the commandant, and I—stood by the mud wall looking out across the desolate stretch of six-foot mounds, thinking each his own thoughts.

‘They were all marked as they were made, of course,’ the commandant finally said. ‘And the only explanation we can think of is that the Turks had German officers. The Turks have a good deal of respect for anybody’s dead, and, so far as we have known, they don’t do that kind of thing. But they took away all the crosses, and now it’s impossible to tell where any man is buried. And there’s a major-general in here, and a number of other officers—’

The hospital at Kut is a civil institution established for the benefit of the native population. It is in the partially patched-up ruin of one of the larger buildings which stands near the one mosque of the town, the single slender minaret of which miraculously escaped destruction.

The doctor, a Scotchman with a delightful bur in his tongue, was in his dispensary, putting up medicines for a line of waiting Arabs. He apologised

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at once for the unhospital-like dilapidation and disorder of the place and was not sure that he would consent to show it to me. It was a trial to his medical officer's conscience, and as soon as he had, by degrees, taught the natives not to be afraid of him and his works, he was going to make the commandant provide him a suitable building. But for the time being his rows of bottles, cases of instruments, and the medical smells which envelop him are, to the native mind, evidence enough of his wizardry ; and anything in the nature of spotless and light, airy wards filled with rows of stiff little white beds would simply frighten them away.

Most of his patients he treats and sends back to their homes at once, but a few cases which require special attention he keeps in some dark, dismal rooms upstairs, which are all he has at his disposal. A majority of these are eye cases.

Among the Arabs there is an appalling amount of blindness. Much of it is caused, perhaps, by the glare and the dust of the desert, but a larger part of it is attributable to the fact that mothers know nothing about the care of the eyes of infants.

It seems to me I have seen literally hundreds of blind children from five to ten or twelve years of age, and most of them utterly hopeless. There are a great many cases of simple cataract, and these the big Scotch medical officer can handle with what the Arabs regard as miraculous success. He has performed dozens of operations and has sent a number of men and women who had been blind for years back to their homes or to their tents in the desert with eyes as clear as anybody's.

But the result is that he is beset by the blind. People come leading blind relatives and friends from miles and miles away, and more often than not there is no sight left to them to restore. Their eyes are completely gone. And this is a fearful trial for the doctor, because they think he could cure them all if he wanted to. They even go so far as

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to make prayers to him and try to propitiate him with gifts, as though he were some kind of wrathful and unreasonable god.

The I.G.C. says that as soon as it is possible he is going to organise small units of doctors and oculists and send them out all over the country on medical missionary tours. They will perform operations, attack disease of all kinds, and undertake to hammer into the heads of the people a little information about preventive measures, especially as regards the care of the eyes of small children.

When we left the sad little hospital we went back to headquarters and climbed to the roof, from which—with what emotions who can say?—General Townshend watched for weary weeks the enemy surrounding him, and the repeated efforts of his own people to rescue him. And there we stood and reviewed the tragic, tremendous story, with the whole scene of it lying before us like a map.

It was not until the sun had sunk in the far-away desert glories of evening and the moon had begun to shine palely on the river that the A.D.C. and I, with subdued minds and saddened hearts, bade the commandant good-bye on the river-bank, boarded our launch, and slipped down round the great bend to where the comfortable old S-1 lay moored before the bustling new Kut—a new Kut ablaze with a myriad cheerful lights.

CHAPTER XVIII

WITH GENERAL MAUDE IN COMMAND

LIEUT.-GEN. SIR STANLEY MAUDE took command of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force on the 28th of August 1916, and, according to his own report to the War Office, he devoted himself up to about mid-December to preliminary preparations for a resolute offensive, the enemy's intention apparently being to hold him on the defensive in the Tigris River region below Kut while they developed a big drive down through Persia—this being a revival of their original plan.

Maude had first to develop adequate base support, and then to get into utmost fighting trim large bodies of men who had suffered not only the fibre-destroying tortures incident to a record hot season, but the demoralising effects of defeat.

By December he had accomplished the concentration of his forces near the enemy positions south of Kut. On the night of December 13th the Big Drive began. Until those forces surrounded and passed north of captured Baghdad on the 11th of March 1917, they were in practically continuous action.

There were four divisions of infantry and one division of cavalry; the corps commanders being Lieut.-Gen. Sir A. S. Cobbe, V.C., D.S.O., astride the Tigris, and Lieut.-Gen. Sir William Marshall with the cavalry and a strong force of infantry to the westward and on the Shatt-el-Hai. The enemy was strongly intrenched in long-established positions on the Hai and at Kut-el-Amara, and it is interesting to record that hordes of well-armed

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Arabs hovered on the flanks of both armies—as is their custom—ready to fall upon and help to cut to pieces whichever side should begin to suffer defeat.

The weather throughout the period of operations was execrable, and managed to contribute to the grand sum of horror and suffering a bewildering variety of acute irritations. During the early part of the cool season it is usually burning hot at mid-day and freezing cold throughout the night, there being a daily variation in the temperature of from thirty to fifty degrees. And there are the sand-storms which, while they last, put a stop to all activity and inflict upon human flesh a peculiar and unbelievable torture. Then, when the rains begin, the fine dust of the plains is turned into the thick viscid mud through which neither man nor beast can make any kind of progress. After that the floods come down the Tigris and Euphrates and great areas are submerged, while unsubmerged areas become untenable from the extraordinary seepage of the tremendous marshes which lie between the two rivers and east of the Tigris. In places the desert bubbles as though in fermentation.

All the way through General Maude's account of the operations there are references to unfavourable weather conditions :

Operations were hampered by heavy rains which fell during the last week in December and the first week in January, flooding large tracts of country. . . .

Where the ground was not too sodden by rain and floods our cavalry was constantly engaged in reconnaissances, in harassing the enemy's communications west of the Hai, and in raids, capturing stock and grain. . . .

The enemy position in the Khadairi Bend was a menace to our communications with the Hai, for in the event of a high flood he could inundate portions of our line by opening the river Bunds. It was, therefore, decided to clear the Khadairi Bend. . . .

Intended operations west of the Hai by the cavalry and



The British Residency, now General Headquarters, Baghdad.



New Street, Baghdad.

WITH GENERAL MAUDE IN COMMAND

a detachment of General Marshall's force were necessarily abandoned on account of the mist. . . .

On the 10th of January the attack was resumed in foggy weather, and the enemy was pressed back trench by trench, till by nightfall he had fallen back to his last position. . . . During these operations the fighting had been severe and mainly hand to hand, but the enemy, in spite of his tenacity, had more than met his match in the dash and resolution of our troops. . . .

The movements of the cavalry had meanwhile been restricted by the water-logged state of the ground. It had been intended to move the division *via* Badrah and Jessan against the enemy's rear . . . and reconnaissance showed that the proposal was feasible; but soon after the movement had commenced a heavy thunderstorm burst over the district, and the flooding of the marsh of Jessan and its neighbourhood rendered progress impracticable and the attempt was abandoned.

The most brilliant incident of the whole campaign was the crossing of the Tigris River north of Kut in the Shumran Bend. This happened at the end of two months of terrific fighting and after the Turks had been driven entirely from the west bank of the river and had taken up their final strongly defensive position on the Kut peninsula—the scene of the siege—and down the east bank in the maze of trenches on the field of Sunnaiyat, which they had occupied and had been engaged in strengthening for nearly a year. This position was protected from flank attack by the great Suwaikieh Marsh, which lies, miles on end, within easy seeing distance eastward from the river. As the General describes it :

The water-logged state of the country and a high flood on the Tigris now necessitated a pause, but the time was usefully employed in methodical preparation for the passage of the Tigris at Shumran. Positions for guns and machine-gun crews to support the crossing were selected, approaches and ramps were made, and crews were trained to man the pontoons. In order to keep our intentions concealed, it was necessary that most of the details, including the move-

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ment of guns, should be carried out under cover of night. Opposite Sunnaiyat, where it was intended to renew the assault, artillery barrages were carried out daily in order to induce the enemy to expect such barrages unaccompanied by an assault as part of the daily routine. Minor diversions were also planned to deceive the enemy as to the point at which it was intended to cross the river.

What General Maude calls ‘minor diversions,’ created for the purpose of deceiving the enemy, developed later on, while preparations for the crossing were in progress, into a strong attack by Lieutenant-General Cobbe at Sunnaiyat, the success of which so surprised the Turks, who believed this position to be impregnable, that they became utterly demoralised and broke into confusion—‘fleeing for dear life away to Baghdad.’

The crossing of the river was a wholly impossible thing—so little anticipated that the enemy was struck with astonishment and had no time to concentrate effective resistance. A captured Turkish officer said they had discussed the possibility of such a move, but had decided that against such resistance as they were prepared to offer ‘only madmen would attempt it.’

The river was in flood and was three hundred and forty yards wide at the point where the bridge was thrown across. This operation being carried out under machine-gun fire which swept ferries and pontoons and inflicted heavy losses on the British. But, in the words of General Maude, the men worked with ‘unconquerable valour and determination.’

They began with the first ferry just before day-break on 23rd February, and by 4.30 P.M. the amazing bridge was ready for traffic and the Turkish army was in full retreat toward Baghdad, but fighting every foot of the way. While the advance from Kut to Baghdad was accomplished in only fifteen days, it was made in the face of such stubborn resistance as served to cover one field after another with mingled British and Turkish dead.

WITH GENERAL MAUDE IN COMMAND

In no campaign of the war has there been such continuous hand-to-hand fighting.

The country, a vast region of yellow sand and grey-green marsh, stretches away to the far horizons as level as a table-top and without so much as a bit of scrub brush for cover, so the operation was a continuous performance of move forward and intrench. Along the entire distance there are to-day the shattered and shell-riven remains of a network of defences which tell a tale beyond imagining, and in their stark and glaringly revealed extent they demonstrate that modern war with all its slaughter and horror is largely a matter of prodigious physical labour.

But to return to the operations. In the meantime the gunboat flotilla, which had supported the advance from the river, proceeded upstream, shelling the enemy in retreat and coming itself under heavy fire from guns of all kinds that were covering the retirement along the banks.

At Aziziyeh, just half-way to Baghdad—the spot where the original fatal decision was made—General Maude halted for reconcentration and reorganisation of his lines of communication; but after a quick readjustment the pursuit was resumed. Then for two days the armies plunged forward—eighteen miles one day, seventeen miles the next—in a blinding dust-storm which limited vision to a few yards in any direction.

The enemy made a final strong stand in a previously intrenched position at the Diyala River, and here for three days the British troops suffered decimating fire from concealed machine-gun batteries, as they worked in vain to force a passage of the stream by ferry and pontoon.

Meanwhile General Maude, who had taken one of the big paddle-wheel supply-boats for headquarters, moved on up the river and at a point a few miles south of the mouth of the Diyala threw a bridge across and transferred two infantry divisions and

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his one division of cavalry to the west bank, up which they proceeded to march at a forced pace toward Baghdad. This flank movement, threatening to cut the resisting Turkish forces off, compelled their immediate flight beyond Baghdad, their rear-guard engaging the British with admirable tenacity and tremendous valour all the way.

It was a matter of considerable regret to most persons concerned that General Maude made no triumphal demonstration upon his arrival at Baghdad. It was thought that a display of pomp and a parade of victory might have a properly subduing effect upon the native population and serve to enhance the local prestige of the conquering forces. But General Maude was undemonstrative in every way. In obedience to his orders a few troops were marched through the city from the south entrance, and a patrol of the streets was instantly established. But as for himself, he ordered the captain of his floating headquarters to bank in at the river wall under the British Residency, and, accompanied only by his personal staff, he walked ashore and up into the city as casually as he might have done had he been only a very tired traveller arriving under the most ordinary circumstances.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE SHADOW OF AN ANCIENT RUIN

AFTER Kut-el-Amara—Ctesiphon, the last point of interest below Baghdad.

Ctesiphon is pronounced as it is spelled, except that the C is silent. In a philologically orthographic, or whatever it may be, sense the C probably has a perfectly legitimate excuse for being there—just as the ‘h’ has indisputable rights in the middle of Baghdad—but it is slightly in the way, and there are persons who can never avoid stumbling over it.

Yukon, for instance, was never able to disregard it, so he invented a pronunciation all his own. I do not know exactly what it was, but it had the C in it, right enough. In fact, it had it in several places, and the effect was rather splendid. It was something like ‘Cesticicispison,’ and he stuck to it resolutely in spite of any amount of pointed reference on the part of others to ‘Tesifon’ in its simplest form.

There is nothing at Ctesiphon now—nothing but a wide waste of knobby desert, the mounded graveyard of a buried city and the lone, marvellous arch which has stood through so many centuries, offering mute, compelling testimony to the grandeur of the Eastern Empire destined to fall before the onrush of barbarian Arab peoples, newly inspired by the Moslem faith and fired with fanatic zeal.

But on the banks of the river Tigris the great arch of Ctesiphon is a comparatively modern structure. It belongs to the Christian era, and on

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the banks of the river Tigris one begins to pronounce in a familiar way names that were on the tongues of men five thousand years ago.

The mounds of the dead cities in the midst of the desolation have not revealed the story of the infancy of the human race, but they have revealed one of the main sources of the cultural stream upon which humanity has drifted and, it may be, is drifting always toward broader and more tranquil depths. Even the age of Sargon—the twenty-eighth century B.C.—seems on the banks of the Tigris strangely recent.

'Sargon was the first great leader in the history of the Semitic race, and he was the first ruler to build up a great nation in western Asia, reaching from Elam to the Mediterranean and far up the Two Rivers northward. His splendid conquests made an impression upon the Tigris-Euphrates world which never faded. . . .' So says Breasted, in his *Ancient Times*.

But in Sargon's time the legends of the people with regard to the world's beginning were the legends we revere to-day, and they were as dimly remote to them as they are to us. Their gods were gods of the elements.

About the twenty-second century B.C. a tribe of Semitic Amorites crossed over from the Mediterranean coast lands and seized what Breasted describes as 'the little town of Babylon, which was at that time an obscure village . . .' And one hundred years later there rose in this tribe a great king. His name was Hammurapi, and it was he who first made Babylon mistress of the then world, and welded together a mighty kingdom under the name of Babylonia.

This was fourteen centuries before Nebuchadnezzar was born, yet archaeological research has brought up out of the buried cities of the Babylonian plain a written record of Hammurapi's reign so clear and so detailed that we can follow

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the life of the wise and mighty old monarch almost day by day.

The Arch of Ctesiphon an ancient ruin ? No, not at all !

Up and down and back and forth over the face of the known world the human race moved in innumerable waves and distinct divisions, while to the east of Babylonia those great tribes of Aryan origin, the Medes and the Persians, advanced to place and power.

These people already had a religion. They worshipped fire as the truest manifestation of an Almighty Being, and they had evolved a code of morals quite as fine in many ways as any code that has followed it.

But came among them between the thirteenth and tenth centuries B.C. a great mystic and interpreter—Zoroaster—who brought order out of the chaos of religious fantasies, and founded a splendid faith which lives to-day, its original nobility modified but little by the superstitious and philosophical accumulations of the centuries. This faith is founded on a definite distinction between right and wrong, and assumes the existence of two great influencing spiritual powers; one—Ahuramazda—the Lord of Right and Wisdom; the other—Ahriman—the Spirit of Darkness and Evil. Between them, as a kind of intermediary deity, stands Mithras, the Angel of Light.

I do not know if offerings of evil things to the Spirit of Evil are made by modern Zoroastrians as they were by the Zoroastrians of other ages, but one does know that from many a fire altar to-day Mithras carries upward from the minds of men flames of pure thought and exalted prayer to the throne of Ahuramazda.

Who can estimate the power of a single life ? Of Zoroaster we do not know the true name, nor when he lived, nor where he lived, nor exactly what he taught. But

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the current from that fountain has flowed on for thousands of years, fertilising the souls of men out of its hidden sources and helping on, by the decree of Divine Providence, the ultimate triumph of good over evil, of right over wrong.¹

The stars of peoples ascended in this land, rose to their zenith, and declined. A long line of Assyrian emperors marches across the pages of history to battle chants and the clang and clash of the accoutrements of war ; Sennacherib passes proudly by to gaze in disdain upon the cities and palaces of his predecessors, and to build arrogant Nineveh, from whose mighty walls he gazes east and west across a world within his grasp.

Came an era when Babylonia was no longer Babylonia, but Chaldea, with Nebuchadnezzar embarked upon a career of such magnificence and power that after twenty-five centuries humanity still stands agape before conjured-up visions of his splendour. The Chaldeans, allying themselves with the Median hosts, march against the walls of Nineveh ; and two centuries later Xenophon with his Greek legions passes by and gazes in astonishment upon the mounds of fluted sand which even then covered the seats of the once mighty Assyrians as to-day the sand mounds cover the cities on the Babylonian plain.

Then passes Cyrus, king of Persia, worshipping Ahuramazda, and hurling his serried hosts against the Lydians ; and finally against the walls of Babylon—Cyrus freeing the Children of Israel and commanding that the temple of the Israelitish God at Jerusalem be rebuilt, while bowing himself before his altars of fire.

Cambyses, son of Cyrus, conquers Egypt, and the Persian Empire stretches from Elam to the sands of the Sahara. After whom Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes ; Xerxes carving on the wall of the great fire temple at Persepolis :

¹ *Ten Great Religions*, by James Freeman Clarke.

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Ahuramazda is a mighty god who has created the earth and heaven and men ; who has given glory to men ; who has made Xerxes King, the ruler of many. I, Xerxes, King of Kings, King of the earth near and far, son of Darius an Achaemenid. What I have done here, and what I have done elsewhere, I have done by the grace of Ahuramazda.

Looking down across thirty miles of desert to the Pusht-i-Kuh, a range of Persian mountains that lies like a great, long, rugged opal against the eastern horizon, one sees with the mind's eye the ruins of Susa—biblical Shushan—where in his palace Ahasueras, son of Xerxes, ‘showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days’ and ‘made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days in the court of the garden of the king’s palace :

‘Where were white, green, and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble. . . .’

Shushan—where the brave and beautiful Esther got Haman hanged so high, and where ‘Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple’ to smite the enemies of the Jews.

It was a colourful age !

Then Alexander, the great Macedonian, son of that Philip against whom Demosthenes launched his ‘philippics.’ What names go hurtling through one’s thoughts !

Alexander the Great marches down across Asia Minor, through the Cilician Gates, and along the coast of the Mediterranean, to meet the Persian forces under the third Darius, and to hurl them back across the plain and the river Euphrates ; to refuse the better half of the Persian Empire, and then to march on and on, conquering the world and sighing

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for more worlds to conquer. Only in the end to turn back from the far places to Babylon—which was itself a far place to the exalted Macedonian—and to die there in the palace of the Babylonian kings !

He had conquered the world, and his heirs were his Macedonian generals. One of these, Seleucus, takes possession of the Land of the Two Rivers and the rich conquered territories of the Mediterranean coast. He founds the city of Antioch, and on the west bank of the Tigris, on the shortest highway between the two rivers and within a day's easy march of Babylon, he causes to be built the city of Seleucia.

The city of Seleucia ! It lies directly across the river from the Arch of Ctesiphon—a great undulating mound of sand, like the other mounds. Nobody has yet delved into it for historic records and treasure. But perhaps it is not worth while. As ruins go it is such a *modern* ruin !

Centuries pass ; Rome rises to pre-eminence and declines, while the fires that Zoroaster kindled in the hearts of the Persian peoples keep alive in them a consciousness of race and a will to live.

It was in the third century of the Christian era that the family of Sassanid arose to the east of the Mesopotamian rivers and, by an inspired revival of patriotism among the Persian tribes, succeeded in establishing the Sassanian Empire.

For a capital the Sassanian kings built the city of Ctesiphon on the for ever strategically valuable shortest highway between the two rivers.

The Sassanids were mighty, and the Sassanian Empire continued to grow in might, the Oriental splendour of its court having been beyond the powers of men to describe.

The Sassanid emperors were Sun-gods, worshiping Ahuramazda as that deity's representatives upon earth. They realised in their forms and cere-

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monials what Alexander had designed for himself, and nothing could surpass the magnificence and the colour of the pageant of their lives.

The Arch of Ctesiphon is all that is left of the audience-hall of the Emperor Khusrau. It dates from about the sixth century. It is one of the largest and most extraordinary ruins in the world, and is so massively and so amazingly built that one looks round and about over the naked desert in the midst of which it stands, and wonders how a city whose builders were so great could possibly disappear from the face of the earth.

The arch itself was the throne-chamber, and on the other side of it there was another tremendous wing like the one which still survives. The arch, it is supposed, was always open at one end, as it is to-day, and across it, covering its whole vast height and breadth, was a jewelled tapestry. On this tapestry was worked a wonderful landscape in precious stones.

The Sassanian Empire was overthrown in the middle of the seventh century by the irresistible cohorts of the Kaliphs, and Baghdad, in its turn, came to be founded as a great capital in the Cradle of the World.

This war closes one's mind to old historic vision. It dwarfs the very ghosts of world conquerors that have loomed so large in the background of the world's advancing life, and sets a gulf between itself and other wars the world has seen across which no one can get a just perspective.

The British troops on the way to Baghdad with General Maude knew Ctesiphon principally as the field of General Townshend's disaster, and they knew, too, I suppose, that there was a ruin there—even a mighty ruin. But I doubt if many of them had a mental vision of it that was not wholly overwhelmed by the reality.

Some of them, it is said, regarded it chiefly as a

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much too valuable post of observation for the enemy and wanted to shell it. It is visible from many miles away down river and across the plain, and from its top the view would be unobstructed as far as the strongest glass could reach. But they were forbidden to touch it, and after the armies had passed, the new British masters of the immediate destinies of the land and its peoples caused to have built all round it a barbed-wire fence, and notices were posted to explain to the people the great historic value of the old monument and to ask them to give up their age-old practice of taking bricks out of it for modern building purposes. It is easy to believe that Ctesiphon was quarried to build Baghdad, as the Rome of the Cæsars was quarried to build the commonplace Rome of later days. And nothing in Rome very greatly surpasses in magnificence of construction this wide-flung and wholly self-supporting arch.

But we must get on now. We are to lunch with the British Army Commander in the City of the Kaliphs. The gentlemen with whom I travelled were greatly concerned lest I should be expecting too much. They wanted to shield me from inevitable disappointment.

'Baghdad is just worse than nothing,' they said.
'It's a rotten hole!'

If you were on your way to Baghdad you naturally would be expecting too much. You would be expecting to see something, at least, that would offer to your mind a suggestion of the domed and minareted Moslem city of Oriental story.

But the flat-roofed and mud-coloured huddle of human habitations sprawling along the high wall which lines the great sweeping curve of the palm-fringed river would appeal to you at once as being curiously in harmony with the moods of the country you had learned on your slow journey up-river to

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know so well in its desolate but wonderfully sunlit raggedness.

There are mosques, of course, with minarets aplenty, but they are all quite ordinary ; rather cheap, in fact. All but one. From far down the river you look across a wide stretch of open desert and see, hovering away off in a blue haze green-edged with the green of palm-trees, the great round golden dome and the many slender shafts that rise above the mosque of Kazhi-main. And if you know no more than you ought to know you will take this vision for a first glimpse of Baghdad and be wholly satisfied. But Kazhi-main is on the west bank of the river, four miles above Baghdad, and before the city comes into view it has disappeared altogether from your range of vision.

When General Maude took Baghdad there came steaming up behind his floating headquarters the battle-scarred fleet of monitors and small river gun-boats and a long line of supply-boats of various kinds. The S-1, with General MacMunn and his staff aboard and with Yukon at her wheel, was among the first to arrive, the General having come up directly behind the army with fifty boats heavily laden with supplies for the immediate establishment of an advanced base.

As we rounded the last great bend which brings Baghdad into view they told me how it had seemed to them then. Not any one of them, the skipper included, had ever been there before, and they said the thrill of rounding one wide curve of the river after another, knowing nothing of what lay beyond the next, and of coming at last full upon the town which had been so long the British objective and for which they had paid such a fearful price, was overwhelming.

The high banks were black with cheering throngs ; there were people everywhere—on the housetops, in every window and balcony, lining the river walls. Their welcome was genuine. When the Turks

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left, anarchy was let loose in the city, and at the moment the British entered chaos reigned, while bands of murderous Arabs were looting the bazaars and scattering terror in every highway and byway. This state of affairs lasted just as long as it took British patrols to march through the streets and no longer, while a few subsequent hangings and imprisonments, and the excellent conduct of the British troops, served to restore almost at once the complete confidence and serenity of the people. British occupation of Baghdad was regretted by nobody but the defeated Turks and the offscourings of Arabian tribes who were halted in their criminal pursuits by the immediate establishment of British law and order.

CHAPTER XX

THE MAN OF MESOPOTAMIA

So I did get to Baghdad, after all !

We anchored a short distance off the bank in front of General Headquarters, and after a little while a launch came out to get me and took me down-river a couple of hundred yards to the landing at the Army Commander's house. He and his two A.D.C.'s were waiting on the little pontoon platform to receive me, and as he helped me ashore he said :

' Well, here you are ! That's good ! Come along in now, and let's have some lunch.'

That was all. It was as though I had been away for a few days and had just returned. But it was peculiarly characteristic of the man. His thoughts ran in clean-cut grooves and his besetting weakness was punctuality. It was a quarter past one o'clock and his luncheon-hour was one. He had waited for me an unprecedented fifteen minutes !

The house, at the edge of the high river wall and reached at low water by a flight of wooden and very rickety steps, was most interesting. It was bristlingly historic, of course, having been the home of two German-Turkish commanders before General Maude took possession of it. General von der Goltz Pasha died in it—of cholera, they say—and it was the residence of Khalil Pasha, who commanded the Turkish forces while Baghdad was Turkish headquarters.

We walked across a terrace on the river-bank and entered the dining-room, where everything was

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in readiness for luncheon. This room, a few feet below the ground-level of the house, had a mud-brick floor, and its bare walls were painted a fearful saffron hue, which seemed to have had some intention of being yellow.

Like all other residences in Mesopotamia, the house was built round a wide, paved court, and the living-rooms opened on a second-floor balcony on the inside. It was not a particularly comfortable house, and was about as elaborate in its furnishings as a camp in the desert. General Maude occupied the room in which Von der Goltz died, and seemed rather pleased with the idea of doing so. Then there was the western terrace, with a vineless arbour built over its railing, from which one got a magnificent view up and down the wide sweep of the river. But since the whole river side of the house had to be screened in with canvas on account of the pitiless terrific sun, the terrace was not of much use.

There were always impressive-looking sentries posted on it, and also in the corridor outside the General's room ; while on the street side there was always an adequate guard. There had been frequent plots to assassinate General Maude, and only a day or two before I arrived a perfectly arranged scheme had been uncovered by the secret service, with the result that the schemers got into very serious difficulties and the guard surrounding him was strengthened.

As for my own accommodations, General Maude had written that he was afraid I should be very uncomfortable, and had then proceeded to have prepared for me quarters so entirely comfortable that I felt a definite sense of embarrassment when I walked into them. It didn't seem quite right, somehow, that in such a place somebody's time should have been wasted to make such provision for me.

After luncheon the General took me himself to

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my rooms and made a quite thorough investigation to see that everything was in order.

'This is really no place for a lady!' he said. 'But we've fixed things up a bit—and don't you go doing without anything we can possibly turn up for you.'

On my packing-box dressing-table, with a mottled mirror propped up on it, and on the desk in my sitting-room, there were *violets*. Violets in mud-coloured and dust-enshrouded Baghdad! They were small single ones like 'Johnny-jump-ups,' but they were fresh as morning dew. I had to exclaim about them, of course, and then the General told me how he came by them. He said that so far as he knew there was only one bed of violets in all Mesopotamia.

'Somebody must have told the chap who owns it that I like violets,' he added, 'so he sends me some every day. Always have a little bunch of them on my desk at General Headquarters. Nice, aren't they?'

I write all this principally because by doing so I am able to throw a brief light on a phase of my host's character with which few persons seemed to be familiar. I had been told that he was casual to the point of indifference in his attitude toward everything but his work, and that I was likely to find him 'difficult.' With the grave responsibilities of a war zone weighing upon him, one would hardly expect a man to be anything but casual toward unimportant persons and affairs, but General Maude was as genial and kindly a host as I should have expected him to be under the most conventional circumstances.

He was a very impressive figure of a man. He was six feet three inches tall, and any one would have known he was a soldier, whether he was in uniform or not. His innate kindliness expressed itself in a gleam of humour that was hardly ever absent from his eyes, and he was rather fascinating

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when he talked, because of a slow drawl in his speech and a vein of quiet fun peculiarly his own.

At the beginning of the war General Maude commanded a brigade in France, and was severely wounded. As a matter of fact, there was a bullet lodged in his back where the surgeons could not get at it, and it gave him trouble always. He told me about this himself and about how, with one leg temporarily paralysed, he thought for a long time that he was done for. For services in France he was made a major-general, and when he recovered from his wounds he was sent to command the Thirteenth Division at Gallipoli. After the evacuation of Gallipoli he brought this division to Mesopotamia and commanded it in all the subsequent attempts to relieve General Townshend at Kut. After Townshend's surrender he was appointed to command the Tigris Corps, and later succeeded to the full command of the Mesopotamian forces, after which the uninterrupted success of his career won for him the enviable title 'Maude the ever-victorious.'

He was specially promoted to be a lieutenant-general for his services in Mesopotamia, and was made a Knight Commander of the Bath. He was also a Companion of St. Michael and St. George and had a D.S.O. for services in the South African War. The French Government made him a Commander of the Legion of Honour.

Few persons ever referred to 'General Maude.' It was always 'the Army Commander.' And the atmosphere of command with which he managed to envelop himself was extraordinary. One felt the tremendous personal influence of the man. He was in every man's mind—the Army Commander; on every man's tongue—the Army Commander; a figure so potent that to think of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force without his calm intelligence behind it, directing it in its ever-

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victorious progress, was not possible. He was pre-eminently the Man of Mesopotamia.

He worked literally all the time he was awake ; getting up every morning at five o'clock and putting in two hours before breakfast looking over papers and dictating telegrams.

He breakfasted at seven, and was always in his office at headquarters by eight o'clock. He had a habit of remarking quite frequently that in war time was an element of first importance, and the greatest offence any one could commit was to waste a moment of his carefully planned day by being late for an appointment with him. The man who was not punctual to the minute could not hope to enjoy his confidence. He made every detail of his operations his personal business, and delegated unshared responsibility to nobody. Yet despite all this he found time to think of and to attend to all manner of small and unimportant things, and to take an active interest in the life of the community, and in the affairs of everybody around him. If he had known anything at all about the fine arts of indifference and of getting other people to do his work he would have been an unqualifiedly great man.

His choice of a way to do anything was always the quickest way, and he did not know what fear was. He hated automobiles, and travelled to and from his battle-lines by aeroplane. For trips up and down the river-front he used a glisseur, the swiftest thing afloat.

The attitude of the men of his personal staff was like nothing else I ever encountered. They were devoted to him without question, and when he was not present they expressed their concern for his welfare with the utmost freedom. But they had perhaps a too profound respect for him to serve to the best ends the uses of intimate association, and they were never able in his presence to be anything but militarily correct.

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General MacMunn's A.D.C. was for ever 'ragging' him with regard to measures for his own safety and physical welfare, and I had come to look upon good-natured scolding as among the definite duties of an A.D.C. But General Maude would have considered advice touching his individual habits an unwarranted interference. In my privileged impudence and blissful ignorance of his character, I told him one day that I thought a man in his position who did not regard his health as a matter of primary concern was guilty of a kind of treason for which some form of punishment should be provided.

When any one made so bold as to protest against his using an aeroplane, he always referred to a friend of his who 'fell down a little stairway and died of a broken leg.'

He was going out to Ramadie one day—headquarters on his western line—and one of his A.D.C.'s asked if he would not please have a message sent through to them as soon as he arrived.

'I will not,' he replied. 'Why should I? If I don't get there they will probably let you know sooner or later. Then you might send out and gather up the pieces.'

That first afternoon, after he had looked my quarters over and I had tried to tell him how grateful I was to him, and how much I appreciated the privilege of being in Mesopotamia, he asked what in particular I thought I wanted to do.

'I want to do everything you will permit me to do,' I replied.

'Yes, of course,' he drawled, in his delightful way, 'but what, for instance?'

'May I go to the front?'

'My dear lady, you *are* at the front.'

'Yes, I know, but may I go out to the lines?'

'You may—wherever you like. What else?'

'May I go to Babylon?'

'No, that, I'm sorry to say, you may not do.'

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I shall not knowingly take a risk of having you killed, you know, and the desert between here and Babylon is infested with hostile Arabs.'

'Wouldn't a couple of armoured motor cars be all right ?'

'They might be, and again they might not. Motor cars in the desert are not invariably reliable. I nearly lost a bishop in one of them last week. He thought he had to see Babylon before his education would be complete, and the Arabs got after him. There was quite a party, and a valuable party, too. They had to make a run for it—and anything might have happened to the car, you know.'

CHAPTER XXI

ROUND ABOUT TOWN

OUR little household for the time being consisted of the Army Commander, his military secretary, his two A.D.C.'s, and my always-trying-to-be-inconspicuous self.

When I arrived General Maude more or less turned me over to his aides. Or did he turn the aides over to me? In any case, while I was his guest he deprived himself constantly of the services of first one and then the other, each taking his turn in accompanying me here, there, and everywhere—wherever I wanted to go.

I was afraid, in the beginning, that to take them away from their regular duties was to make myself a good deal of a nuisance, but I soon learned that I was a kind of godsend to a couple of earnest but average young men who had done nothing for one solid year but attend to business. The only other visitor they had ever had to take care of was the bishop, whose adventure had made it impossible for me to go to Babylon.

Naturally the bishop's chief interest in life was the spiritual welfare of everybody concerned. All the bravery and fidelity in this war is not monopolised by soldiers! I have read what he wrote about his visit, and I think the task of accompanying him could hardly have been regarded by any one as a release from the exactions of laborious and methodical duty. He began each day with a dedication somewhere, and ended it with a confirmation, having filled in the intervening hours with services of various kinds and with painstaking inspections

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of all the chapels, hospitals, and Y.M.C.A. quarters within a radius of a day's toilsome round. And he made hay while the sun shone at the rate of about one hundred and fifteen degrees even in the shade of the few sheltering palms. But I am not laughing at him, of course. I am laughing at the young A.D.C. who had to keep up with him. The only thing I have personally against him is that trip to Babylon !

Most of the things the aides showed me they saw for the first time with me, and they were as keen about it all as I could possibly be, though they had been in Baghdad nearly a year. The Army Commander bent his brows in mock severity and threatened to count against them as leave all the time they spent with me, but he, too, was interested. To my surprise, Baghdad as a place to be visited was more or less a closed book to him as well as to the rest of us, and after spending the morning on the big job at headquarters, he came home to luncheon each day with a demand that we tell him all about our doings.

Baghdad as the City of the Kaliphs and of Harun-al-Rashid's benevolent strolls is absorbingly interesting, to be sure, but I was far more interested in observing the effects of modern events and of the occupation of the historic city by a British army. If you should be carried by aeroplane from a far place and dropped down bound and blindfolded into the centre of Baghdad to-day, turned round three or four times and then set free, you would open your eyes, look about you, and say :

‘ Well, I don't know what town this is, but whatever it is the Germans beat me to it ! ’

The last thing the commander of the Turkish forces in Mesopotamia did before he gave up the fight to hold Baghdad was to send a polite message across to General Maude asking him to refrain from dropping shells or bombs into the city.

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The British thought this rather humorous at the time, since the most devastating thing their Army Commander ever dropped or ever intended to drop into Baghdad was a limited edition of a proclamation calling upon the people to preserve order and to fear nothing from British troops. But the sublime cheek of it was realised when they began later to shovel and dig their way into certain sections of the city through the ruins of British property.

There had been a bank and a number of good business and office buildings that were built and occupied before the war by British firms engaged in international commerce, and all these were reduced to heaps of dust and rubbish. Not a single piece of British property was left standing except the Residency, a rather imposing building on the river-front which reminds one forcefully of the days when Great Britain maintained a special and somewhat stately relationship with the Turkish Empire. Without a doubt the Residency also would have been destroyed had it not been in use at the time as a Turkish hospital. It must have cost the German officers some bitter pangs to leave it.

And at that it was in a sorry condition. As a hospital it was dirty and unkempt beyond anybody's power to describe, and the British found it filled to capacity with wounded Turks who had been abandoned—left behind without a medical officer or even an orderly to attend to their needs!—this being one of the few bad counts the British have marked up against the Turks. And they wonder about it. One of the medical officers who entered the city with General Maude's army summed up the situation as 'the most horrible mess' he had ever encountered. That any army medical service could perpetrate such an outrage against its own wounded was a thing beyond his British comprehension. He was ready to concede that leaving the wounded behind might have been a necessity, but he could imagine no circumstances under which

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it might be necessary to leave them without medical or nursing attendance. It was three days before the British came in ! My doctor friend told me in still angry recollection that he wanted almighty to go on a rampage and soundly thrash everybody in Baghdad who might have taken care of them and did not. No wounded men of any nationality ever got better care than did those Turks at the hands of the British.

As for the wanton destruction of British private property, there is no doubt in anybody's mind, so far as I have been able to discover, that it was ordered by German officers in a spirit of vindictive hatred. Just as nobody doubts that the stripping of the British graves at Kut-el-Amara of the simple crosses that marked them was a German-inspired outrage. To rob the dead, wantonly, of the sweet shelter of identification that means so much to the loved ones left behind— !

It may be that it is wronging the Germans to lay at their door all such unnecessary outrages against human decency, but if it is they have nobody but themselves to blame. The reputation they enjoy is surely the result of their own unaided efforts ; efforts magnificently organised and ably directed wherever they happen for the time being to be in command of things.

But the Turk—it is rather a curious situation as regards the Turk. In spite of considerable evidence to the contrary and the number of tremendous shocks he has received, the average Englishman has never quite surrendered the idea that in a general sense the Turk is a gentleman. A gentleman, to be sure, who commits wholesale murder and crimes so overwhelmingly atrocious that they cause a whole world of men to quake with horror, but a gentleman, nevertheless, who, as a rule, is incapable of petty meannesses. Is that not astonishing ?

There is no doubt at all that in straight battle

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the Turk fights in a spirit of ‘may the best man win.’ He endeavours with admirable determination to prove himself the best man, but he never stoops to unfair advantage and he never displays in any way that soul-searing quality of hatred with which the German people have made the world so appallingly familiar.

I was never more surprised in my life than when I was told by a British officer that in Mesopotamia the British do not require gas and liquid fire, because the Turks have always steadfastly refused to employ such things against them.

This is worth a moment’s special consideration. On both sides the Mesopotamian war has been fought with shot and shell, and, so far as is known—and aside from the uncertainty as to the fate of British prisoners in Turkish hands—the Turks have broken no established rules and have refused throughout to adopt modern German methods of inhuman terrorism and frightfulness. They have observed all the hitherto internationally customary courtesies and decencies with regard to the wounded and the dead on the battle-fields; they have respected the Red Cross as their own Red Crescent has been respected; and have displayed throughout a tendency to maintain the conventionalities and to uphold the ethics of what was once known as ‘civilised warfare.’

It is all very curious, and one fails somehow to understand. It would surprise us very little if the ‘terrible Turk’—surely convicted before the world of terribleness—should resort to barbarous methods even against such a respected enemy as England. But it seems he has not, and I have yet to hear an Englishman refer to the Turkish enemy—as such—in any but terms of respect. And always with the simple idea that he must be ‘licked into line’ at whatever cost; the ultimate fate of Turkey being from an international viewpoint one of the most important issues of the war.

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There are a great many thoughtful and intelligent Turks who realise, as I know from personal contact with them in Constantinople during the war, that Germany is playing with them her favourite bully's game of 'heads I win, tails you lose.' But for some unexplained, and as yet inexplicable reason, the Turks go on playing it.

The British Residency was soon emptied of its pitiful hundreds of wounded Turks, and became General Headquarters for the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force—the G.H.Q. of everyday conversation. The Turkish infantry barracks inside the Wall on the river-bank, the tremendous cavalry barracks outside the old North Gate, and a number of other more or less suitable large buildings in the city, were quickly cleaned out and remodelled for hospital purposes, while the Turkish General Hospital—a very creditable modern institution, but also occupied by deserted Turks, and in a very Turkish state of uncleanness—was put in proper condition almost overnight.

The junior A.D.C. and I climbed into a low grey service car in front of the house, and whirled away at the usual nerve-trying speed of an army car driven by a soldier chauffeur. We rushed past G.H.Q. with its mud-brick wall skirting a ragged, dust-powdered garden; past low-roofed residences buried in unkempt greenery; past a few coffee-houses, where crowds of picturesquely-clad citizens sat cross-legged on wooden benches, drawing lazily at the long stems of narghiles, and so on into a wide, torn-up, extraordinary street off which here and there one caught glimpses into deep, dim bazaars or into side-streets that were piled high with the debris of deliberate destruction.

This street is casually known as New Street, and is now Baghdad's principal thoroughfare. It was cut by Khalil Pasha on the advice of the Germans,

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and it was ruthlessly done. No Turk would ever think of doing such a thing on his own initiative, the Turks being partial to narrow, airless ways and sunless passages. The Germans, however, believe in wide streets and plenty of room, and they are quite right.

But to hew a street as with a battle-axe straight through the heart of such a city as Baghdad required some lack of consideration for the feelings of the inhabitants and the property owners. There was no question of investigating or respecting proprietary rights. The street was simply cut through. And some of the property owners were so cast down by it that to this day they have not troubled to remove from the half-cut-away buildings the evidences of human occupation. They left pictures to dangle forlornly on the walls of rooms, and bits of furniture here and there to become weather-beaten and unsightly. They look horribly exposed and ashamed, these rooms do.

Even a mosque which lay in the way of a straight line marked out for the street had one corner hacked away, and to so desecrate a mosque is in the mind of the orthodox Moslem an unforgivable offence. No more unpopular thing was ever done in any city, yet on the whole it was a good thing to do, and the British have reason to be thankful for it—and glad that it was done while the Germans were in control. The British are reaping a reward of gratitude and trust by undertaking gradually to reimburse the property owners and to assist them in rebuilding and in re-establishing themselves in business. The street was needed.

Baghdad has a population of about one hundred and forty thousand, but it is compactly built and over-crowded, and one gets an impression that it is a small town on a holiday, with everybody in from the country for miles around. As I drove through the heart of it I tried to get a vision that would stay in my mind in photographic detail of the strange multi-coloured and intermingled life that I was

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seeing for the first time. But it was not possible. There were too many different kinds of people, and too many curious angles and contours of life. Then there were the khaki and grey—the colours of war—that one saw as by far the most important and interesting thing to be seen, yet that contrasted so sharply with the general scheme of things.

We had to turn out into a ditch to get past a long convoy of guns that was lumbering and clanking along, accompanied by many officers on handsome horses, while on the other side of the street, disputing the way with automobiles and donkeys, was a long line of camels ambling disdainfully through the mob under heavy loads of army duffle of varying degrees of lumpiness.

In many of the gaping frontless houses, and in tiny bits of garden here and there, were Persians and Arabs and Oriental Jews at their everlasting drowsing over coffee and hubble-bubbles ; there were women, hundreds of them, unveiled for the most part, but wrapped from head to feet in gorgeous-hued and all-enveloping *abahs* ; Kurd porters staggering under unbelievable burdens, and other Kurds wearing the same black pot-hat that was worn by their forefathers thousands of years ago—as is proved so often by the picture records discovered in the buried cities ; droves of coolie women all but lost to view under loose enormous bundles of twigs and desert grass roots that are carried in for fuel ; lordly turbaned Moslem elders looking very important in black flowing robes ; red-fezzed Jews in misfit European clothing ; handsome Persians in high white lambs-wool caps and long silken coats of many colours ; slaves—slave women and slave men from East Africa, black as ebony and with shifty eyes full of inquiry and resentment ; and Christians—Christian peoples from the north and Christians of ancient Chaldean stock who are Arabian so far as costume is concerned, but who are unlike their Ishmaelitish brethren in that they

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are as white as Germans, many of them, and have eyes as blue.

We came at last to the old North Gate where the New Street ends. The North Gate is a ragged remnant of the ancient city and has great heavy, nail-studded doors, swung back. On either side stands a British sentry, and they saluted us as we passed by clicking their heels together and smartly tapping the butts of the guns at the shoulders.

Out beyond the North Gate we came into a vast expanse of nothing, in the yellow, sandy midst of which stands the tremendous Turkish cavalry barracks which is now Indian Stationary Hospital No. 61, with a capacity of more than thirteen hundred beds.

It was our intention to drive round the city on the outer embankment of the dry moat which skirts what was once the Wall, and this we proceeded very bumpily and uncomfortably to do.

Baghdad had a *wali* once upon a time who conceived for some reason the noble idea of destroying the old Wall, filling in the moat, and turning it all into one grand boulevard.

A Germanly inclined critic would be likely to say, And were the Germans responsible for that ? No, probably not. Else it would not have been done in such a delightfully human and haphazard fashion. It was a laudable plan, perhaps, but it was carried out with customary Turkish leisureliness and graft, and in the result one sees much more of the preliminary destruction than of the intended subsequent improvement.

The road we travelled was indescribably awful, and the comment of the A.D.C.— jerked out rather comically between bumps—was to the effect that it was ‘no-kind-o-va road—over which to ta-ka lady-j-oy-riding !’

But I assured him it was quite all right because the view was ‘per-fectly su-p-erb !’



Through the North gate. Victorious British entering
Baghdad, famous city of the Kaliphs.

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Looking westward through the afternoon haze toward the palm-fringed Tigris, the City of the Kaliphs seemed to be almost all that one might want it to be. Its domes and minarets are covered with bright-coloured tiles or mosaics, and, viewed at close range, they look rather tawdry. But from out there in the desert one saw the grace of them, and their colours seemed to blend into a radiant glow.

We rolled, rocked, bumped, and teetered down off the fearful moat road and came into a vast Mohammedan burial-ground, in the midst of which stands the mosque-like tomb of the Kaliph Omar. Then we plunged up again and on to the one-time East Gate of the city, through which a succession of conquerors have marched in triumph into Baghdad.

It seems a great pity that the Turks did not realise General Maude's intention. He came up to the city on a river boat, entered it with a minimum of pomp and spectacle, and marched his troops by the shortest and easiest route on to the northward in pursuit of the retreating enemy. If the Turks had known he would do this, the interesting ancient gate of the conquerors might have been spared. There is a tradition that whoever marches through this gate victorious in arms establishes a lasting rule in Mesopotamia, so before they left the Turks added considerably to its destruction and filled in the remaining fragment of its beautiful arch with a solid block of masonry. They probably thought General Maude knew about this tradition and expected him to take advantage of it, and they were taking no chances on the establishment of permanent British rule.

A short distance outside the South Gate, at the edge of a desert that stretches away in utter emptiness to the eastern horizon, we came upon two very small, very snug, very curious foreign cemeteries. They lie close together, but they are definitely

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apart. Each is surrounded by its own high mud wall, and each is shaded by a few tall dusty palms and low feathery tamarisk-trees. One is British. The other is German.

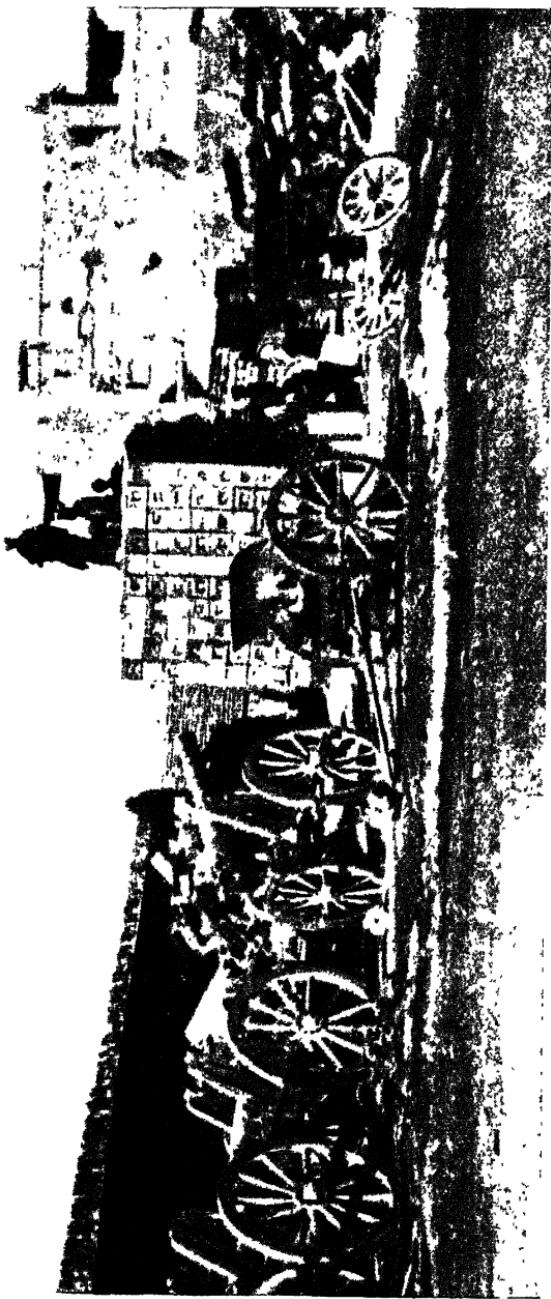
One is British ; a British cemetery of peaceful days when Britons lived and died in such far places as Baghdad in the pursuit of diplomacy, commerce, scientific research, or the mere idle delights of *wanderlust*. Wonderful German word !

The other is German ; a German cemetery of peaceful days when Germans lived and died in such far places as Baghdad in the pursuit of the German variety of diplomacy, of commerce and scientific research, and of the almost never mere idle delights of *wanderlust*, as we have learned, to our astonishment and sorrow.

In the German cemetery they buried Von der Goltz Pasha. But his body was subsequently exhumed and sent back to Germany, where one imagines that the Pasha of his Turkish honour and glory will not be too conspicuously displayed upon his tomb. Since he was a German, I have only a vague idea why one should imagine this, but it is said that the Turks loathed him with a mighty loathing, and nobody pretends to believe that he died a natural death.

Five or six hundred—I don't know the exact number—of the men who went into captivity with General Townshend died when they reached Baghdad, and are buried in a palm-grove on the other side of the river. They were not given graves ; they were merely put away under levelled ground, the location of which the British might never have learned had it not been for some Arabs who helped to bury them and some sisters in a French convent who begged and obtained permission to nurse them when they were dying.

For this devoted service the British Government has conferred upon these sisters a war decoration of a high order ; and they are greatly beloved in



The British Guns captured by the Turks at Ctesiphon and Kut. Found here in the Citadel

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Baghdad. They are just a small company of humble little nuns, but they are French, and who can tell what they must have suffered during the thirty-two months of Turkish and German domination !

When the British learned where the Kut prisoners were buried a number of them wanted to have the bodies taken up and reburied with all the honours of war in the new military cemetery outside the North Gate. But General Maude said No. He was strongly opposed to any such course and positively refused to sanction it.

'Poor fellows,' he said, 'let them lie where they are. It is their own spot, and nothing we could possibly do would add anything to the honour that is already theirs. Some day we will make a little park of their burial-ground, and give them a monument—all their own. That would be better, much better than to disturb them now.'

And at once everybody agreed with him.

We had driven all round the city and came at last to the south entrance, which leads into the wide, but altogether hideous, New Street. This was the entrance through which a small detachment of the conquering British army marched on the 11th of March 1917.

We passed our own house, which stood not far from where the vast reaches of the desert leave off and the town begins, and went on again through the maze of things, to the mosque of Abdul Gilahin Quadhir.

We went to the mosque of Abdul Gilahin Quadhir for no other purpose, I thought, but to convince ourselves of the uselessness of doing so, though I did catch tantalising glimpses of a great inner court, and of graceful fountains round which many of the faithful were engaged in devout ablutions.

No 'infidel'—it does seem strange to be classed as an infidel—is allowed to enter a mosque in

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Baghdad, or in any other holy Mohammedan town. And so scrupulously is this Moslem principle respected by the British that they post Mohammedan Indian sentries outside all mosque entrances in order to discourage any Tommy who, in a moment of exuberance, might be tempted to break in for a peep at the so carefully guarded mysteries. They say the British soldiers have some to-do to restrain themselves. If the mosques were wide open and free to any one who might wish to enter, they would be no temptation at all. But—forbidden ground!

And one day a Tommy actually did get into this most sacred of all the sacred mosques of Baghdad—the mosque of Abdul Gilahin Quadhir. He went in disguised as an Arab, with *abah*, *kuffiyeh*, sandals, and everything. But his disguise was not perfect in all its details—one can imagine a young Britisher trying to act like an Arab!—and he was seized and dealt with very severely. It is a wonder he escaped with his life. Then he was imprisoned for disregarding regulations and was afterward sent out of the country in disgrace, while the British officers—hiding smiles, perhaps—offered gracious apologies to the Moslem elders, who were graciously pleased to accept them.

No story, I think, better illustrates the methods and the success of the British with subject peoples whose faiths are different from their own. And no story serves better to emphasise why with peoples of alien beliefs the British are always a success.

CHAPTER XXII

WHENCE HARUN-AL-RASHID STROLLED

THERE is not much in Baghdad to remind one of the grandeur and the greatness of its past, but when I walked lingeringly under the lofty arched gateway of the Citadel one morning I quite felt that I was stepping out of the grinding and gruelling Now into the restfulness of the finished ages. But the first thing I saw was a recently captured Krupp gun standing out on Harun-al-Rashid's parade-ground; so I came straight back to Now.

There is an old bronze cannon just outside the portal that has been there for no telling how many generations, and though it would be a wonderful prize to set up on a British greensward somewhere, it is perfectly safe where it is because to take it away would be to rob the women and children. I don't know how or when it acquired its wizard's power, but it possesses such power, and no man child is born within reach of it who is not brought by his mother and held for a moment in front of its muzzle while she mutters the incantation which, by the gun's magic virtue, puts upon him a spell of human excellence.

I was comparing this delicately decorated instrument of the polite warfare of a better age with the shining, black, business-like and murderous-looking Krupp when the commandant came hurrying out of a cavern of early-world wickedness to welcome me.

It must have been a cavern of wickedness. It is impossible to imagine its walls echoing anything

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but the moans of the tortured and the sibilant whispers of sin.

The commandant took me at once to see what had been detaining him. We walked through a low door in a massive ruined wall, went down some crumbling steps, and came into a long, perfectly preserved, grey baked-brick corridor that could not have been more than five feet wide and was certainly not less than forty feet high. And it was wonderfully vaulted overhead. It was a passageway of some sort in the ancient palace of the Kaliphs.

Along one side of it there were numerous openings in a wall about four feet thick which led into the deepest dungeons that imagination could picture. And it was in the dungeons that the commandant was interested.

In them the Turks had stored a tremendous quantity of lead in long round bars that were ricketed in even rows running away into the depths of the gloom farther than one's eyes could penetrate.

That they should have attempted to destroy such indestructible material is rather amusing; but they did, and in doing so they at least gave the British some extra and arduous labour. Most of it escaped and was being moved out and stacked in a courtyard to await the process which would convert it into bars bearing the stamp of the British supply department. But in some of the dungeons the fires the Turks started continued to burn until the metal was melted down into solid masses. And now these masses were being attacked with picks and drills and the lead was coming out in great, ragged, shining chunks. I thought it was the most interesting bit of mining I had ever seen.

Outside, in the lee of a wall that was built about the year 800, a number of Britishers were feeding rubbish and desert grass roots into a long, improvised brick furnace, over which were suspended a half-dozen common-looking kettles filled with

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molten lead that bubbled and boiled, while a number of other men were engaged in pouring the metal into moulds strung in rows along the ancient flagstones.

The Citadel is little else but a vast walled enclosure now, but it once contained a number of marvellous buildings, as the ruins of the palace of the Kaliphs marvellously prove. And the walls themselves are wonderful. They are about forty feet across, and consist within of great chambers that stretch away city blocks in length, their vaulted ceilings being upheld by mammoth pillared arches of brick.

These magnificently built walls surround three sides of the stronghold, and along the fourth flows the broad, slow-moving Tigris, held within bounds by a high embankment of time-pitted masonry which, continuing upward in a splendid sweeping curve, forms what was once the outer wall of the palace, and suggests scaling-ladders and all the Old-World paraphernalia of war.

In the inner wall chambers the Turks stored modern munitions, and there was a fairly satisfactory haul of shells of various calibre to go with captured guns.

But the most precious prizes the British got with Baghdad were the guns that were taken from General Townshend at Ctesiphon and Kut. The Turks did a few things to them, and left them behind in the Citadel. They turned out to be rubbish more or less, but they meant more to the Englishmen than all the other loot put together. One of them was sent home to the King.

Then there was a great arsenal filled with small-arms and small-arms ammunition, and behind this, in what seems to have been the area of destruction, and where the British guns were found, was a stack of about forty thousand rifle-barrels.

The rifles had been fed into a bonfire, and all the wood on them had been burned away, but the

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barrels, lying in a huge haphazard heap against a high wall, were at least interesting. They looked to me like a mountainous pile of fire-blackened and altogether useless giant reeds. A number of Arab coolies were engaged in the task of sorting them out as to sizes and styles, while inside many others were deftly sorting ammunition and putting things to rights generally.

The Turks really attempted a wholesale destruction before they left, but either they were in too much of a hurry or the construction of the old buildings is such as to defy even high explosives. They planted dynamite in the pillars of the wall chambers of the Citadel, but the only damage observable consists of a few cracks and jagged holes. Whether or not the dynamite traps that were found in a number of buildings here and there throughout the city were purposely left is not known. It is charitably supposed that they were all charges that had failed to explode. But they greatly endangered the lives of hundreds of British workmen, and it is merely providential that no serious accidents have occurred.

When they were hastily remodelling and equipping a certain industrial school building for use as an automobile repair shop they came upon dynamite planted in the flagstones of the floor—enough to blow up the whole neighbourhood. This was the first discovery, and you may be sure that thereafter everybody worked warily in explorations with pick and shovel.

I was not sure I wanted to visit the prison. Its sinister walls, seen across the wide parade ground, were enough to make me think to myself, ‘Oh, well, prisons are prisons.’

But the commandant seemed to be rather keen about it. And besides, he had given nearly two-thirds of the prisoners a half-day off from work on a new road up the river in order that I might see

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them. Moreover, the prison was in a part of the palace of the Kaliphs, and there was no other such prison anywhere on earth.

So he said. But I always approach prisons with my heart in my mouth. It is not fear. It is horror. The thought of a prison is quite enough to restrain my criminal inclinations. Though maybe criminal Arabs are not exactly people.

A heavy modern steel door hinged on an ancient six-foot wall swung open a few inches, and we went in. We were met by the warden—an Englishman in Mesopotamia in civilian clothes!—and were conducted into an inner court round three sides of which the prisoners were standing in an uneven stoop-shouldered row. They were barefooted, clothed in heavy grey wool sack-like coats and short trousers, and a majority of them wore leg-chains. A more villainous-looking crew no writer of lurid fiction ever pictured.

The warden barked a sharp command in Arabic, and they all dropped to their haunches. Another command, and they spread their hands out, palms up, in front of them.

Off in one corner by themselves were several very respectable-looking citizens—Baghdadi Jews—in their own voluminous and rather attractive garments, and as they obeyed the warden's order to sit down and hold out their hands they looked like nothing so much as a lot of long black-whiskered bad boys doing a ridiculous kind of penance.

'What are the otherwise dignified gentlemen in for?' I asked.

'For not paying their debts to the Government,' was the rather startling answer.

In the good old Turkish days government was not such a positive quantity as it is now, and it was not nearly so regularly conducted. Such a creature as a tax-collector who could not be induced for a consideration to under-estimate property values and to overlook many of a man's

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belongings did not exist. In fact, there was no fixed system of assessment. A Turkish collector paid into the coffers of the state the amount decided upon as his district's quota ; he collected as he could from the taxpayers, and kept the margin of personal gain sufficiently wide to make his job attractive.

The British changed all that. They instituted a system of equitable assessment on established British lines, and the taxpayer now gets a notice to betake himself to a certain place and pay a fixed sum within a fixed period. Most persons are satisfied to accept this innovation because they see in it a positive benefit. Moreover, they see that all moneys collected, and vast sums besides, are being spent on public improvements. They have been able to get along always without good roads, clean streets, decent sanitary arrangements, and all other modern necessities, but, once these are provided, they begin to appreciate the value of them.

But these respectable-looking old men in durance vile were among the few who liked the old way better, and who refused to conform to the new order of things. Their sentences were indeterminate in that they would jolly well have to stay right where they were until they made up their stubborn minds to 'come across' and accept the responsibilities along with the privileges of citizenship. The warden laughed, and said they spent hours sitting around mumbling and grumbling about it and going over long columns of figures.

We went on round the court, into the immaculate kitchens and into workrooms of various kinds—tailor shops and carpenter sheds—and at every door the warden spoke the guttural, harsh-sounding words that brought the prisoners upstanding with palms out. I understood the wisdom of this precaution when a man in the kitchen—a terrible-looking, black-browed brigand with bad-conduct

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stripes on his chest—laid down a big meat-knife in order to obey !

A deputy watched the inner court while we explored the cells that were once dungeons, but that have been lighted and ventilated for the sake of the British conscience ; then we came down past a row of large rooms with barred steel doors that open into the court.

All round sat the awful band of criminals, watching every move we made, and as we passed one of the barred doors *a long arm reached out and a bony hand clutched at me!*

I am not trying to be melodramatic, but I never felt a more unpleasant thrill in my life. Behind the barred door were seventeen men, and they had ranged themselves in a line, all leaning suppliantly forward, while he of the long arm and bony hand pressed against the bars and whined a petition in which I could catch but one word—‘ *Mem-sahib !* ’

He was addressing me.

The warden and the commandant stopped and listened. And I should like to remark in passing that the British always seem to have good men who can speak the languages of the tribes they have to deal with. They showed no signs of impatience or anger. They merely listened.

‘ What does he say ? ’ I asked.

‘ He says they all want justice, and only justice ; that they can get no hearing ; and that if you, who are the only lady ever seen within these walls, will appeal for justice for them, they know their cases will be taken up and that they will be at liberty shortly to return to their families.’ The warden spoke in a commonplace sing-song, as a man does in translating offhand.

‘ Who are they ? ’ I asked.

‘ All men condemned to death.’

‘ But they have been tried in the usual way, have they not ? ’

‘ Certainly ! ’

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‘ What were their crimes ? ’

‘ Murder, mostly—though a few of them were caught giving information to the enemy.’

‘ Then what can they hope to gain by such an appeal ? ’

‘ Oh, nothing. It is Arab habit to make appeals. We leave them practically outdoors, as you see, and put them under very little restraint of any kind. And everything they do teaches us something about the breed. We really want to know as much about them as we can. It simplifies the task of handling them justly and rightly.’

On the flat roof, overlooking the beautiful, palm-shaded Tigris, they showed me the scaffold. It was a double one, but rather antiquated, and they dwelt at some length on the advantages of a new one that was about to be substituted. Then we had quite a conversation about capital punishment in general, and, to my surprise, I found that my supposedly case-hardened companions were quite sentimental about it. They hated it abominably. But the warden thought that as long as it is retained on the supposition that it discourages criminal propensities, it ought to be made as unpleasant as possible.

CHAPTER XXIII

ACROSS AN AMAZING RIVER

THE senior A.D.C. and I started out one morning to explore the opposite bank. We sent our automobile across early because the single pontoon bridge which spans the river opens at certain hours to let the boat traffic through, and at other times is likely to be closed to ordinary traffic for the benefit of long military convoys. And to break a military convoy for personal reasons is Offence Number One in a war zone.

We crossed at our leisure in the Army Commander's launch, and, being privileged persons, went cruising on the way through the maze of marvellous things afloat which make of the Baghdad river-front a scene of inexhaustible fascination.

First there is the pontoon bridge. Then there are the goufas. A boat bridge of some description has spanned the Tigris at Baghdad for ages, it being impossible, it seems, to build an ordinary bridge across a river that has an annual rise of more than twenty feet, and that cuts up all kinds of didoes ; but the one now in service is a 1917 British model, and is not too thrillingly interesting after one has seen some others—less substantial, perhaps, but far more historic—farther down, where crossing and re-crossing the river under the withering fire of a determined enemy was so much a part of the British experience ‘when Maude went north.’

The goufas are wonderful ! I suppose I ought to be reminded by them of something besides the ‘three wise men of Gotham who went to sea in a tub.’ But nobody else who has written about them

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has ever thought of anything else in connection with them, so why should I bother? For that is exactly what they remind one of. They are perfectly round reed baskets, 'pitched within and without with pitch.' They have curved-in brims and look for all the world like enormous black bowls floating uncertainly about. They are the only kind of row-boat the Baghdad people seem to know anything about, and the river at times is literally crowded with them.

They roll round among the larger and more possible-looking craft like a thousand huge, inverted tar bubbles. And the way they are laden is a marvel and a mystery. Many of them ply back and forth as ferry-boats, and it is not at all unusual to see one of them carrying two donkeys, half a dozen sheep, a dozen people, and somebody's entire stock of earthly belongings in bundles and bales. But they are most pleasing to the eye when they are carrying reeds from the marshes up-river.

The reeds are cut with their feathery blooms still on, and are packed in a goufa in upright sheaves, the effect being a gigantic imitation of a Scotch thistle, out of the top of which may protrude the turbaned head and brightly hooded shoulders of an Arab passenger. The men who propel the amazing craft squeeze themselves in under its curving brim and wield long paddles and poles with surpassing skill.

Then there are the mahaylas. On the way up-river one sees hundreds of these great, high-hulled cargo-boats, and they creak along under sail or are towed by long lines of men who, with bent backs and a steady, trudging stride, labour along a path on the shelving bank and manage to make of themselves such pictures as one sees on ancient pottery—pottery found in the graves of men who died thousands of years ago.

When St. Paul was shipwrecked in the *Ægean*

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Sea, the chronicler of the incident wrote that ' fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern and wished for the day.'

The I.G.C. liked to refer to this. And he had read somewhere that, because anchoring by the stern is against all nautical procedure, this passage engaged the earnest attention of the wise men who made the King James version of the Bible, and that there was much discussion about it.

The wording of it was regarded as either a mistake in the original translation or a slip of the pen on the part of the writer. But the subject, having been referred in all solemnity to certain savants of the East, was immediately dropped when it was learned that even then there were many ships plying up and down the *Ægean* coast and on the inland waters of the ancient and unchanging world behind it that were identical as to bow and stern and could anchor either way.

For an exciting experience I can recommend a spin in a glisseur through a waterway crowded with this kind of slow-moving, cumbersome traffic. The glisseur—wonderfully descriptive French word!—and the goufa—also descriptive if you get a sufficient *oof* in it!—are the antitheses of things afloat, the glisseur being a flat-bottomed surface-skimmer with a powerful engine which drives a great wind wheel at the stern. The impudent, dangerous thing makes from thirty to forty-five miles an hour and more noise than anything else that moves.

I went in a glisseur one day to visit the veterinary hospital about five miles down the river, and when I pulled up at the bank at the end of about ten breathless minutes I found the commandant waiting for me. He said that he was sitting in his office and had heard me start. And that is how fast and how noisy a glisseur is.

Besides the glisseurs and goufas, mahaylas and dhows innumerable, there are the monitors and

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tiny 'fly-boats' crouching like terriers of war against either bank.

All these carry anti-aircraft guns, and when 'Fritz comes over' on a bombing-party—all Turkish flying men are German—they get busy and make a noise out of all proportion to their size. They have never hurt any Fritzes in the air that anybody knows about, but they bark well.

The A.D.C. and I climbed ashore up the steep clay bank opposite G.H.Q. and found our motor car waiting for us, our soldier chauffeur having just begun to worry himself with the thought that he had probably misunderstood his orders and gone to the wrong landing.

But he had not. I selected that landing myself. It was near the terminal station of the Berlin-to-Baghdad Railroad, and I was interested in that.

This unprecedently historic railroad, having been completed by the Germans between Samarra and Baghdad, is now the main line of communication with the principal British front in Mesopotamia, and its business end is there at the Baghdad terminal, where acres of sidings and sheds, long lines of freight-cars, many shunting engines, and hundreds of labourers coming and going in the methodical process of handling supplies, combine to form a picture which could hardly be expected to please any German.

And from the terminal of the Berlin-to-Baghdad Railroad to the tomb of Zobeide, favourite wife of Harun-al-Rashid !

One's thoughts travel a rapid zigzag course from age to age in this wonderful land ! Though in connection with the little that is left of old Baghdad it is very difficult to separate fact from the fascinating fictions that abide in such delightfully hazy outlines in one's memory.

Zobeide, however, was real enough, and one is

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told that her almost perfectly preserved tomb is authentic. It is like a gigantic yellow pine cone, and it stands at the far end of a great Mohammedan cemetery that sprawls, a waste of ill-kept mud-brick mounds, along the desert roadway that leads to Kazhi-main.

After skirting the cemetery, this road runs into the queerest little highway on earth—a highway which follows the river Tigris, is lined on either side with date-palms and dusty ragged gardens, and is distinguished for possessing the only street-car track in the country. The track is twenty-seven inches wide, and the cars are narrow, two-storied structures, unlike anything else that ever ran on wheels.

The cars are always crowded inside and out with a motley throng of pilgrims to and from the sacredness of the ancient mosque, and each of them is pulled rattlingly and recklessly along the toy track by two hot, disgusted-looking, knock-kneed dwarf horses that lean against each other in utter dejection every time they are told to stop, and whinny about what an awful place the hell for horses is and about how they wish they had been good before they died in a better world than this.

I wondered if those I met on the way knew that they were serving nobody but the faithful and that their heavy loads of chattering humanity had cleansed themselves at holy fountains and had prostrated themselves in prayer for their own souls? Foolish mental meanderings perhaps.

Kazhi-main—the beautiful shining thing one sees from far down the river—contains the tombs of two Imams, and is the most sacred mosque in or near Baghdad. It is only recently that Christians have been permitted to approach even within sight of its outer gate, but its outer gate, decorated in brilliantly coloured Persian mosaic patterns, is worth going far to see.

Its great round dome and lofty minarets are

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magnificently proportioned and balanced, the minarets being faced with Persian mosaics, while the dome is overlaid with gold leaf that glistens marvellously in the sunlight.

But around it has grown up a town that for dirtiness and dinginess and narrowness of arcaded streets is the worst place perhaps in all Mesopotamia.

On the way back we encountered a long military convoy lumbering down toward the bridge head through a narrow lane between the high mud walls of date-gardens, and we saw at once that we were due to be held up there in the fine fluffy dust for two hours or more. The convoy was using the bridge, and it consisted of a great many heavy guns and caissons, only a certain number of which could be sent across at one time.

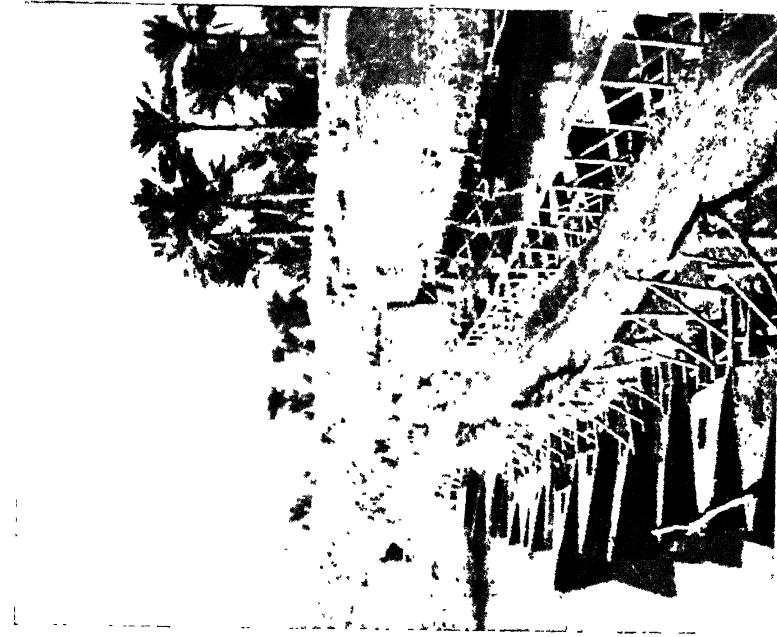
Dear me ! What a hopeless prospect ! And it was within fifteen minutes of luncheon-time. But to break a convoy ? . . .

Once more the fact that there was only one of me and that it was therefore impossible for me to create precedents stood me in good stead. The convoy was broken, and we were let in between two big guns.

Crossing the waving and teetering pontoon bridge would have been ordinarily quite sufficiently interesting ; under such circumstances it became positively thrilling, and all that was lacking to make me feel like part of a victorious army entering a captured city was the sound of the guns of a retreating enemy.



A military convoy in a Mesopotamian roadway through the typical date gardens, Bagdad.



Pontoon bridge across the Dijula at Boguba. Where General Marshall was Corps Commander before the death of General Maude.

CHAPTER XXIV

RIGHTEOUS MEN AND SONS OF INIQUITY

THE junior A.D.C. and I went one afternoon for a browse in the bazaars. I was interested in carpets. I wanted to find a really-truly old historic rug of a vintage that would be mellowed and hallowed by time. Not for myself, of course, but for a friend who can afford such things and who had asked me to find for him in Baghdad—if I ever got to Baghdad—a treasure of a rug to add to his already priceless collection.

‘We’d better go round and see Colonel Dickson,’ said the A.D.C. ‘He knows all about where everything is.’

So we made our way through the winding maze of narrow passages to where our car was waiting at the head of New Street, and pretty soon, on a byway that sloped down to the river-bank, we were stopping before the entrance to a long underground corridor dark as midnight.

But there was a perfectly good Britisher in khaki waiting with a lantern to conduct us through the gloom, and I wouldn’t hesitate to go anywhere with one such leading the way. And the corridor was not underground, after all. It was only under the buildings. And it led at last up into a lovely garden—a really lovely garden, with arbours and vines and fresh-looking palm-trees, and flaming hibiscus against mellow brick walls. Along two sides of the garden was a weird kind of house, picturesquely tumble-down and with a wide, railed balcony running all round it and on out to the river wall.

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And that was where Colonel Dickson lived, Colonel Dickson being Director of Local Resources—which aren’t! Or which *weren’t*, at least. He really should be called Discoverer and Developer of Local Resources—the D.D.L.R.

Colonel Dickson is a South-African—a man of large and important affairs—and he happened to be in London when the war began. As he tells it himself, he divested himself with a single gesture of all incumbrances, then ran hot-foot to the War Office, and at the heads of the powers that were hurled an offer of his utmost services. To keep him quiet they permitted him for the first year or so to help along the job of getting mules and other burdensome but necessary beasts of burden into France. Then they shanghaied him on board a troopship and landed him in Mesopot, where they put him in charge of the job of rounding up the plentiful lack of local products.

The lack was quite complete, in fact; but never mind—men from South Africa are able to show the world how to do almost anything. Colonel Dickson was convinced that the British army was settled in Mesopotamia for a prolonged occupation; he had no illusions whatever with regard to the duration of the war; and nobody could tell him that the country could not be made to support itself.

He went at once into rather extensive schemes of irrigation, and by way of samples of the possibilities he soon had a dairy farm in operation and a few broad acres of one-time desert bright with the luscious green of waving alfalfa.

He organised the native producers and instituted the process of inducing them to work for a little more than their daily bread. He persuaded them to put into grain every acre that would produce grain, and encouraged them with vivid prophecies of a vast prosperity. And when I met him he was about to start a great poultry farm at Hilleh, hard by Babylon, where the chickens would be under

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military discipline imposed by an army officer with the rank of captain—no less.

‘There’s only one rug in Baghdad of the kind you are after,’ he said, ‘and the pleasing little price of it is three hundred pounds. George, get out of here! If you jump on my desk again I’ll pull out your tail-feathers! George! He thinks he’s a dainty little ornament, but he’s a regular devastation!’,

‘George’ being a magnificent peacock with the manners of a spoiled and inquisitive child. It was George’s tea-time, and it was his habit to get his tea off the Colonel’s desk.

‘And where is this three-hundred-pound treasure to be found?’ I asked.

‘A little hunchback Persian Jew down in the bazaar owns . . . Look here, George, if you don’t get out of here I’ll get the fly-paper.’

George turned and stalked majestically toward the open door, while the Colonel leaned back in his swivel chair and laughed.

‘That gets him!’ he said. ‘Wonderful the way that bird has learned English. But you can’t induce him to acknowledge that he knows a syllable of German.

‘I found him here when we took Baghdad. I came in with General Maude, and, in looking round for a place to live, I chanced on this. Rather nice, eh? It was absolutely deserted. Nobody around but George. He was stalking up and down the garden, and I said, “Why, good-morning, George!” and he said, “Good-morning.” And that was how it began. My only objection to George is that, like a lot of people I know, he has friendship defined as something to turn solely to his own profit.

‘About the fly-paper. One of the servants put a lot of the stuff out along the balcony rail one day, and George jumped up and got caught in it. It took us half a day to get near him, and when we did he was ready to surrender. He certainly

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was a pitiful, heartbroken mess, and he 's never forgotten it.'

'How did the little hunchback come by the grand rug ? ' I asked.

'Stole it, probably. He says it was found in Kermanshah, and that it was pawned there by a Persian princess who needed the money. It was one hundred and fifty years in the palace of the Shah at Teheran. At least that 's what he says. In any case, it 's a rare old carpet, and it 's the only thing in Baghdad worth carrying home.'

He sent with us his own Arab factotum—a man he described as 'a jewel of honesty and intelligence'—and as we made our way back through the long dark corridor I heard him calling :

'Hussein ! I say ! Hussein ! '

'Colonel sahib ! ' came the answer.

'Bring George's tea ! '

We came finally up against a flat, windowless house-front under the sombre low vaulting of an arcade, and crept through a narrow broken-down doorway which led into a small court paved with unevenly laid and crumbling sun-dried bricks. This court was open at the top, while round two sides of it, half-way up, ran a railed balcony. The balcony, the walls, and the banister of the rickety stairway were hung with 'antique carpets.' That was what they were called on the little placards that were pinned to them, but a cheaper, more tawdry, more unsightly collection could hardly be imagined.

We climbed to the balcony and went into a dingy little room, the walls and shelves of which were decorated with a lot of antique junk in the hammered-copper line—pelican coffee-pots, trays, water-jugs, and vases—and there we were met by two men. One was the hunchback—an unmistakable Persian Jew—and the other was a smug person wearing a fez and a grey frock-coat of approximate European cut.

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The ‘jewel of honesty and intelligence’ communicated the information that we were there to see the three-hundred-pound carpet, and I rather expected to be bowed to very low and to have it trotted right out for me.

Not at all. One would have thought they had customers in looking for three-hundred-pound carpets every few minutes, and they made a to-do as though they had mislaid it or didn’t know which one I meant, or something. One rug after another was brought out and spread on the slowly accumulating pile on the floor, and time after time I asked, ‘How much?’ only to get in reply the most absurd attempts at unintelligent hold-up that I had ever encountered, and I am rather familiar with Oriental contempt for Occidental judgment.

‘I could buy any rug we’ve seen from any New York dealer for a quarter less,’ I said, ‘and the New York dealer would have to be counting in duty and transportation charges.’

‘Yes,’ said the A.D.C., ‘but think of the romance of buying it in Baghdad, and at a time like this! That’s what these fellows take into consideration. They know our sentimentalities better than we know them ourselves.’

At last the three-hundred-pounder was brought out. Fifteen hundred dollars! Four thousand five hundred rupees!

I was ready to be thrilled—expected to be uplifted by the magic spell of divine art; tempted by the beauty of the thing almost beyond my power to remember that fifteen hundred dollars is a good deal of another person’s money to spend.

I was so safe that it is absurd to write about it.

If I owned the rug I should put it away somewhere in a safe-deposit vault where I could boast about it without ever having to look at it. I believe absolutely that the princess pawned it, but I think she did it because she was shut up in a harem with it and just couldn’t stand it another

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minute. Also I think it remains on the hands of the little hunchback—offspring of generations of scoundrels who staged its entrance for me with such dramatic skill—because no dealer would ever take a chance on it. It was ancient, right enough ; but it was the ugly duckling in the Persian-rug family, and it had in it a combination of salmon pinks and sickly yellows—all fine old vegetable dyes—that would spoil the appetite of an anaconda.

The only other things to be found in the bazaars besides carpets and hammered-copper vessels were Persian lambskins and *abahs*.

The *abah*, draping the head and shoulders of an Arab woman, is a colourful and rather wonderful garment. But British army officers buy *abahs* for their beloved women at home with an idea that they will make ‘magnificent opera-cloaks.’ The best of them cost more nowadays than the finest French brocade in the same quantity would cost, and, being rather bizarrely patterned with threads of gold, they look tawdry. The material might yield to the prayerful efforts of an Occidental artist in the clothes-building line, but I doubt it. For myself, I should always feel that everybody was staring at me and saying :

‘What on earth has that woman got on ! ’

I could have stood for hours on end at a cross-ways in the depths of the bazaars to watch the endless procession and to listen to the weird sounds by which one’s ears are constantly assailed. The widest street is hardly more than ten feet across, and in the softly stepping sandalled throngs that come and go there is every type of Oriental face that one could possibly imagine, and every kind of brightly embroidered and full-flowing costume that Arabian dreams could conceive. Nor would a picture of the bazaars be complete if one forgot to mention the long strings of camels and donkeys—the donkeys quick-stepping along under unbeliev-

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able burdens, the camels moving sedately with supercilious noses sniffing the air above the heads of the people.

The Turk, of course, is conspicuously absent ; but one has suspicions that many a plausible-looking 'Arab' lives in dread of the possible ordeal of being 'scratched' by the British authorities. To scratch an Arab and find a Turk would in ordinary times be most unusual, but the times have developed the useful art of camouflage.

On my second day in Baghdad the Army Commander asked me if I had taken the cholera inoculation. I had not.

' You wouldn't mind doing it, would you ? '

' Not at all.'

' Then we 'll have a little party after dinner this evening,' he said. ' I 'll have a doctor come in about nine o'clock.'

As on the first evening, there was quite a large party of officers at dinner, and at half-past nine I was called out of the drawing-room and conducted to a small alcove where a medical officer was waiting. He attended to me in a very few moments, and afterward, as though it were a rather amusing performance, General Maude insisted on having everybody else inoculated. Everybody but General Maude. He never would take it himself, though his physician had been urging it upon him for a year. His curiously unreasonable excuse was that it would be a waste of serum because no man of his age ever got cholera !

There was very little cholera in Baghdad, and it had never appeared in a particularly virulent form, but, lest an epidemic might develop, every possible measure was being taken to stamp it out. There were a few cases in an isolation hospital outside the walls, and a quarantine camp for suspects had been established a mile or so down the river.

Nobody thought much about it, but at the same time every precaution was taken with regard to

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food, the supplies that came on the Army Commander's table being subjected to special and most careful supervision.

He might have told the doctors that he was too well taken care of to require a cholera inoculation.

CHAPTER XXV

AN UNIQUE ENTERTAINMENT

At dinner one evening we were discussing, as usual, my programme for the next day, and General Maude said to me :

‘ How would you like to see *Hamlet* played *in Arabic* by Children of Israel who are direct descendants of the left-overs from the Babylonian captivity ? ’

I thought it was some kind of complicated jest, and answered guardedly, saying something about the novelty of such a performance.

‘ Novel it may be,’ said he, ‘ but after about the first round it ’s sure to be a beastly bore. In a weak moment I promised to be present, however, so I suppose I shall have to go. I always try to keep my word. It ’s an entertainment being given by a Jewish school to-morrow night, and they ’ve been getting ready for it for weeks. Amateurs ! And *Hamlet*, of all things ! I ’d like to have you go, but not unless you think it would amuse you.’

I assured him that however slightly I might be amused I was bound to be tremendously interested, and that I should like very much to go. Then readily enough I fell in with a plot to get away at the end of the first act in spite of anything that might be done to detain us. Little we knew . . . !

We left the house at half-past eight. And it was very cold. Not being an A.D.C., and having nothing to fear from the big man, I protested against his going out without an overcoat, but he only laughed and refused to send back for one.

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Even so he did not consider it necessary to pretend that he was comfortable. He was cold, and his legs were too long for the automobile, and the streets were execrably rough, and, as I have said, he hated automobiles, anyhow! He was very humorous about it, and we started off, laughing and grumbling with the utmost cheerfulness. It was a curious mood for General Maude, and a delightful one.

He had no idea, really, where we were going, but the A.D.C. had, and along the entire route through the city the guard had been so strengthened that we might have found our way by following the line of pickets. All the streets except the wide and brightly lighted New Street were in semi-darkness, but our side-lights threw long rays into the narrow passages, while behind us a car carrying guardsmen had a search-light which seemed to fill the space all round us with a curious glow. All along the line one sentry after another—click-click-click!—brought his heels together and his rifle to salute. It was rather thrilling.

The ways were narrow, and some of them lay through the bazaars, the vaulting and walls of which gave back to the sounds we made mysterious whispering echoes. Many of the turns were so sharp that we had to back and go forward and back again in order to get round them. And in all the city there was not a sound to be heard except the whir of our own engines, our own voices, and the shuffle and click of sentries' salutes.

As we threaded our slow and jolting way through the ever-changing shadows of the intricate byways, we began to discuss the city's lamentable lack of architectural distinction, and to express our respective opinions of the dreamers of dreams who are able to repeople the mud-brick Baghdad of to-day with the colourful figures which move through the tales of the *Thousand Nights*.

But what would you, under just such circum-

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the balconies and the surrounding windows, was startlingly colourful. The middle of the court was crowded with women in bright silk robes and *abahs*, and our attention was called to the fact that they were unveiled. That was extraordinary. It was the first time high-class Baghdadi women had ever been known to appear in a public place with uncovered faces, and it was a subtle acknowledgment of the trustworthiness of the British. That was what it was intended to be.

‘Under British rule,’ said one man, ‘our women need never be veiled.’

The men in the audience—Jews, Persians, Arabs, Kurds, Syrians, Chaldeans, and representatives of a dozen Eastern races, were all in their finest and most elaborate garments, and there was a variety in head-dress—*tarboush*, *kuffiyeh*, turban, and Persian-lamb cap—positively bewildering.

When General Maude entered, this amazing throng rose to its feet and cheered him loudly and long, and I am sure that any one observing him at the moment would have seen a look of pained astonishment cross his face. They had erected a little platform for him in the centre of the first row of seats directly in front of the stage. This was covered with a beautiful Persian carpet, and the chair he had to occupy was draped with stiff brocade. A lower and less pretentious chair had been placed beside him for my benefit, and I sank into it with a sense of helpless inability to escape from a situation wherein I felt I was conspicuously superfluous,

A good half-hour was wasted in preliminary courtesies. One person after another came up and greeted the General, and there were numerous introductions. The chief rabbi of the city, a large, black-bearded man in long silken robes and a white-and-gold turban, took a seat below the other end of the little platform and assisted in the ceremonies, while the headmaster, a typical Baghdadi

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Jew with a French education and old-fashioned French manners, hovered about and displayed his pleasure in the occasion by much suave gesticulation and many smiles. Then they brought a small table and placed it before the Army Commander and me, on which were two cups, a pot of coffee, a bowl of sugar, and a jug of milk.

Before the recollection of that one must pause to speculate and wonder. Yet one may speculate and wonder for all time. What can any one ever possibly know ? As I write, General Maude lies dead in a desert grave outside the old North Gate, and the night he died they were saying boldly and insistently in the bazaars that he was murdered ! He drank the coffee, and *he poured into it a large quantity of the cold raw milk.* I drank the coffee, too, but *without milk.*

When we looked at our programmes we discovered that *Hamlet* was to be the *eleventh* number, and that among the ten other numbers—children's dances and recitations, odes, choruses and solos—was a French comedy in three acts. All in one evening ? Impossible ! But, yes !

The first number was an address to General Maude delivered in French by a little Jewish girl who wore a white muslin frock, and had a wreath of pink paper roses round her hair.

She read the address from a piece of foolscap paper, which shook in her nervous little hand until one could hear it rattle. It was a kind of eulogy of the Big Chief and of Britons in general, and was full of references to Baghdad's great good fortune in having come at last under honest and honourable government. Perfectly sincere, too !

The words '*Mon Général*' occurred with great frequency, and every time the child pronounced them she thrust one foot forward and made a sweeping gesture with her left arm. It was very painful, but delightful in that it was so friendly, and so kindly meant. At the end of practically

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every paragraph the audience interrupted with vociferous applause.

Then came several choruses and dances done by the smallest children in the school. Sweet little tots they were, too, all done up in Frenchy frocks with many paper flowers pinned on them. They did not know their lines in the least, but they were so charmingly nonchalant about it that they managed to be very amusing.

After they got through they were all brought down by the headmaster and presented to the Army Commander, who took a huge delight in shaking their baby hands and telling them what fine little actresses they were. Then they were permitted to do exactly as they liked, and were not restrained even when they wandered, in blissful unconsciousness of wrong-doing, out on the stage while the French comedy was in progress. They got in the way of the grown-up actors and divided with them the attention of the audience ; but nobody seemed to mind.

Altogether it was the most astonishing performance I ever witnessed, and when one of the actors who was supposed to remain seated throughout a long act got suddenly excited and rose to his feet, thereby disclosing the cramped figure of the prompter curled up under his chair, I began to realise that I was greatly amused as well as interested. Unimaginable setting for a colossal crime. . . . Was it not ? The General laughed with the fullest enjoyment, and I think he did not realise the lateness of the hour. He was always in his bed by ten o'clock.

It was eleven o'clock when the comedy came to an end ; then he turned to me and said :

‘I don't think we 'd better stay for *Hamlet*, do you ? ’

He made a motion to rise, but instantly the headmaster was upon him, urging him to stay for the next number, because it was to be a chorus sung in

AN UNIQUE ENTERTAINMENT

Arabic that had been written specially for him. So we stayed, and were interested principally by hearing the name 'Sir Staneley Mod' breaking a way occasionally through a long barrage of high-pitched and curiously syncopated sound made by the motleyest chorus that ever stood behind a row of footlights. The members of the *Hamlet* cast were all in evidence—Hamlet in buckled shoes and a red-plumed hat, but otherwise black, and the King with a gilded-paper crown. The Titania of one of the dances detached herself and stood off alone that she might shine more resplendently in her silver-starred radiance.

After which we went home, wondering at and discussing the character of a people who could make *Hamlet*, in all its acts and all its scenes, the eleventh item in an evening's entertainment.

We were told afterward that they finished at four o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER XXVI

A DAY'S END

COLONEL DICKSON was going down to Hilleh with an armoured and guarded convoy to bring back some grain and to attend to some details with regard to his poultry farm. Hilleh is within a few miles of Babylon, and he saw no reason why I should not be permitted to accompany him. A sufficient party would take me on over to Babylon, and it would be a valuable experience for all of us.

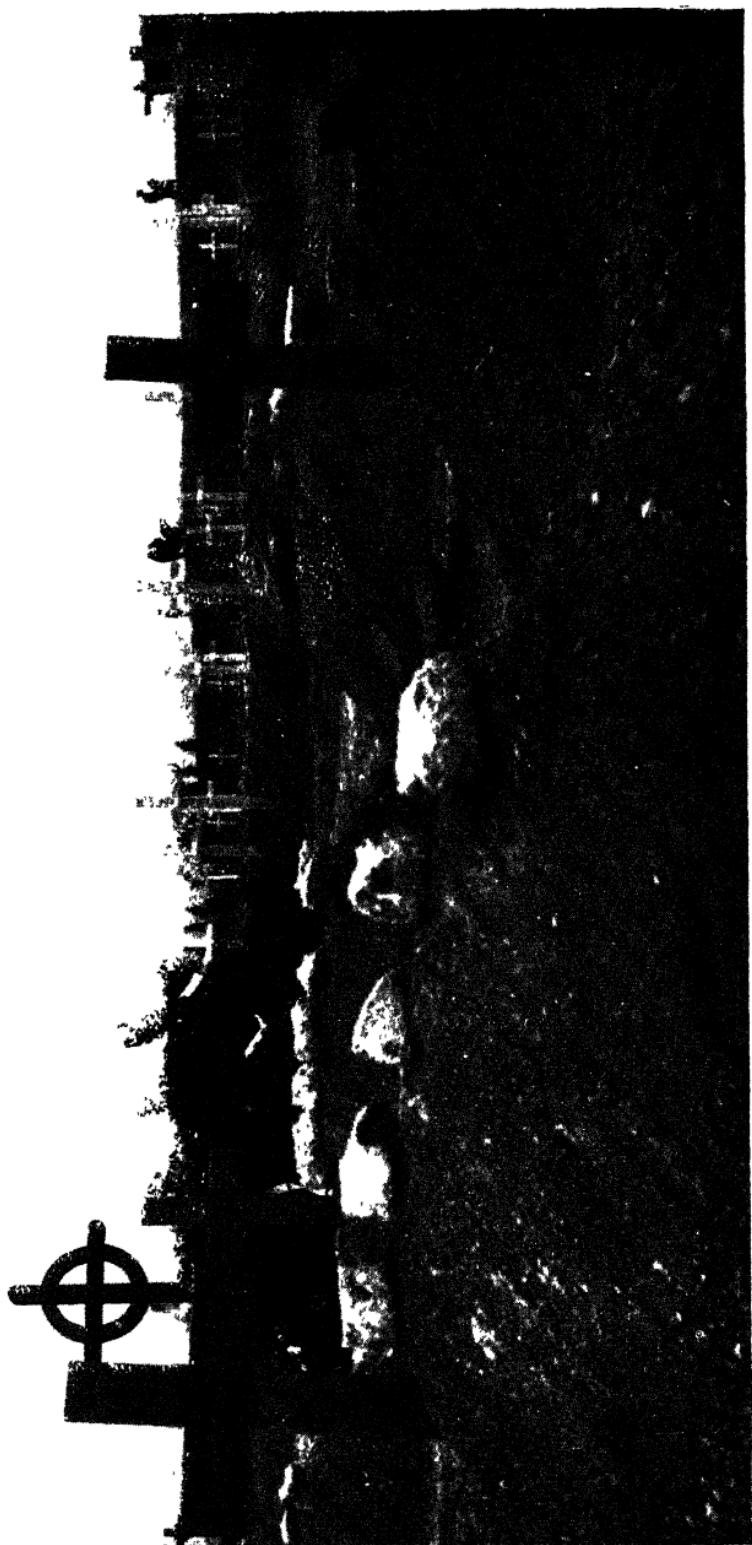
'No reason at all why you shouldn't go!' he said. 'We'll be strong enough to meet any band of Arabs that could possibly get together. You ask the Army Commander if you may go.'

'Not I!' I replied. 'He told me I was not to go to Babylon, and he told me why, and so far as I am concerned that's the end of it. I never could pluck up courage enough to ask him again.'

'Well, you leave it to me,' said he.

And I was quite willing to do so. General Maude was wonderfully good-natured; he had a specially warm spot in his heart for the energetic Colonel, and the Colonel was most persuasive. So I began at once to regard a trip to Babylon as being among the almost inevitable events of the immediate future.

Colonel Dickson was giving a dinner-party that night which was to be a most interesting event. The Army Commander seldom dined anywhere except in his own house, but he had accepted the Colonel's invitation, and it was rumoured that



The doorway remained ...

A DAY'S END

great preparations were going forward in the Colonel's mess. I imagine that nobody who was present at that dinner will ever forget it.

It was a most unusual occurrence for General Maude to be late for luncheon. He was late that day. We had waited about fifteen minutes, when an orderly came in to say that we were to go ahead without him. It cast a gloom upon us, though I don't know why. I don't know why, unless it was that we all enjoyed the luncheon-hour with him and disliked having it broken into. There was always very interesting talk.

About fifteen minutes later he came in by the terrace entrance. He looked tired and drawn, but I imagine nobody ever thought seriously of illness in connection with him. He was so splendidly stalwart. Even then he was in excellent spirits, as he usually was, but he rather startled us with an announcement that he was not going to have any lunch.

'About once a month,' he said, 'I find it does me good to go without food in the middle of the day.'

Then he leaned on the back of his chair and made some characteristically humorous inquiries about what I was doing and how I was getting on. I had taken a glisseur that morning and had gone down-river to see a large veterinary hospital in a palm-garden. I was full of enthusiasm about it, but I felt, curiously, that something was wrong, so I had little to say. He excused himself presently, and went down along the terrace to his room. And I never saw him again. . . .

As soon as he had gone I remarked that he looked very ill, but was assured that he was merely tired. His military secretary, Colonel Williams, did say that he 'would soon be done for' if he didn't give himself a short leave. He had not had a day's leave since he took command of the army.

THE WAR IN THE CRADLE OF THE WORLD

The story of the afternoon I got from others. After a while, it seems, he sent for Colonel Willcox, the consulting physician to the Expeditionary Force, and told him he was ‘feeling a bit cheap,’ and needed something to brace him up. He was sitting at his desk in his room, working. The Colonel told him he looked like a man on the ragged edge, and that he must knock off everything and go to bed.

‘No,’ he said, ‘I can’t do that; I’m dining with Dickson.’

He would not submit to any kind of examination, and merely reiterated that he was ‘feeling a bit cheap.’

The Colonel did what he could at the moment, and at seven o’clock he went in again to see him. He was still sitting at his desk. Then the Colonel literally ordered him to get his clothes off and get into bed.

‘I will do nothing of the kind,’ he said. ‘I’m going to Dickson’s dinner.’

Colonel Willcox, being a member of Colonel Dickson’s mess, was to be in a measure a joint host at this party, and he finally took courage to tell the General that if he insisted on going, he himself would get his dinner somewhere else.

‘I will not sanction your presence there by sitting down at table with you.’

At that the General gave in and consented to stay at home and go to bed. But first he wrote a note to Colonel Dickson, a note that is now, of course, among that officer’s treasured possessions. He railed at the doctor a bit, said he wanted very much to be at the dinner, but was not allowed to go, then added :

‘Take care of my guest. I know you will. And don’t talk to her about going to Babylon. She must not go there, and she quite understands.’

When he laid down his pen his life’s work was over. He had signed his name for the last time.

A DAY'S END

I went to the dinner with the junior A.D.C., and we had not been seated at table more than ten minutes when an orderly came in with a message for Colonel Willcox, who got up and left immediately.

It was a splendid company of men and a most interesting party. The Red Cross band, stationed at the far end of the balcony, played a rather extraordinary programme which the Colonel had had printed. For the times and the place there was an elaborate menu, and a young artist member of the mess had drawn cartoons on the menu-cards, each one of which struck very cleverly at some characteristic of the guest for whom it was intended. It was a jolly party, and there was considerable comment about the superior advantages to be enjoyed by a Director of Local Resources.

He had exhausted the possibilities of local resources to make the dinner a success. And he had done it principally for the Army Commander. But the Army Commander was—not there.

The A.D.C. and I drove up in front of our own house about eleven o'clock. We were quite happily discussing the party—a most unusual event in Baghdad, remember—and were laughing about things that had been said and done.

Colonel Williams came hurrying down the path from the doorway to meet us, and there was a sudden hush. The Army Commander, he said, was very ill.

The younger A.D.C.—and very young—was closer to his chief than any one else, loving him devotedly.

‘What is it?’ he asked presently.

‘Cholera—in its most virulent form!’ said the Colonel.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LAST POST

*Batteries have told the listening town this day
That through her ancient gate to his last resting-place
Maude has gone north.*

COLONEL DICKSON.

WHEN the city learned next morning that the Army Commander was seriously ill an all-pervading hush descended upon it. I passed out of the house of imminent danger—sent away by those who wished to save me from a period of quarantine—and went back aboard the S-1, which still lay at anchor in the river. As I walked through the gardens of General Headquarters on my way to the boat landing I met groups of officers who were discussing the grim possibilities. The question they were asking was :

‘ If he dies who will “ carry on ” ? ’

The solemnity of such a question can hardly be realised by any one who is not familiar with the quality of the influence exercised by an idolised Army Commander in a theatre of war. General Maude had brought the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force out of chaos, and had led it on to unqualified victory ; his name was a name to conjure with. Nobody knew that better than the enemy. He inspired the force with a happy confidence which made itself felt throughout the whole field of operations from the Persian Gulf to the last lonely outpost on the far-flung circle of defence, and to have him removed was like shutting off the current in a vast system of gloriously electric enterprise. The thought in most minds—a thought very frequently expressed—was :

THE LAST POST

‘ Could anything exceed the luck of the Germans ! ’

But, strangely enough and fortunately, no man is indispensable. That afternoon they telegraphed for Lieutenant-General Sir William Marshall, and he came in from the eastern front.

The last time the Army Commander roused himself at all was to say to his military secretary :

‘ Tell them I can’t come to the office to-day. They must just “ *carry on* ” ! ’

The evening of the third day he died.

General MacMunn’s A.D.C. and I had taken a launch, and had spent an hour or more plying up and down the fascinating river into which the sunset colours melt so marvellously, but we did this for no reason and to no purpose but to get rid of lingering time and to escape for a little while the necessity for merely waiting—waiting—with our eyes fixed on the house a few yards away where we knew the tremendous, hopeless fight was being made. When we got back aboard the S-1 I found my servant Ezekiel crouched in the doorway of my cabin. His face was buried in his arms, and he was weeping.

‘ Oh, lady sahib ! lady sahib ! England’s great man ! ’

That was all. I thought it rather wonderful. He had made friends with General Maude’s Indian butler, and had had the freedom of the house all the time.

Early next morning the boom of minute guns began to roll across the city from one direction and then another. The sun rose upon the British flag, half-masted in the midst of war.

The only other flag flying in Baghdad was the American, and the banner of our love, floating from its staff on the roof of our Consulate next to the

THE WAR IN THE CRADLE OF THE WORLD

Army Commander's house, drooped its folds on a level with the Union Jack. And I felt then, with a thrill of pride, that the two stood prophetically sentinel over the high destinies of humanity which he who lay beneath them could no longer help to direct. Together to-day, I thought, they pay honour to the honoured dead. Throughout the world hereafter together they will 'carry on'—equally clean and lofty in purpose and principle; each resplendent with unconquerable power !

It was about midday that 'Fritz came across to pay his respects.' There had been so many guns throughout the morning that I did not instantly recognise the difference, but it took me only a moment to realise that such a quick succession of shots, and from every direction at once, could never be intended as a salute for the dead. I was sitting in my cabin on the S-1, and rushed out on deck just in time to see him directly over G.H.Q., and flying fairly low.

He passed over our helpless old boat, and we had a breathless moment wondering if he would drop something on us. All the monitors and little 'fly-boats' down along the banks were roaring at him, but he got across all right, and we watched him as long as he was in sight. He was flying westward toward the Euphrates front, with every gun in the vicinity blazing away at him, and with a sufficient accuracy of range at least to ring him about with feathery white smoke puffs of exploding shells.

We wondered then if this untimely visit had any special significance. Did the enemy know that the Army Commander was dead ? The news had been flashed to the world, and there was little reason to hope that the German operators had not picked it up. We only hoped that our own operators had not mentioned the name of the terrible disease that killed him. If the Turks and Germans knew he

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died of cholera it would be natural for them to suppose that Baghdad was in the grip of a terrific epidemic.

But no, the visit of Fritz had no special significance. He had merely been over bombing the eastern front. He had dropped a few bombs on a cavalry encampment, and had done considerable damage. But at the moment he could not figure even as an incident. On the British side the usually taut muscles of war were relaxed, and the only thought in any man's mind was of immediate incalculable loss.

There was no suspicion then that General Maude had been murdered. At least no Englishman expressed such suspicion; though the native population was already whispering the sinister gossip.

They asked me afterward, in their mere perplexity over the fact that he was stricken with the disease in an unprecedentedly virulent form, what he had taken at the entertainment at the Jewish school. I told them. And then they thought they knew. The disease developed within the right period of hours after he alone drank that coffee and *that milk*.

It is not true, as has been said, that the coffee was a cup of particular ceremony, and that he was compelled by respect for custom to drink it. It was placed before him as a usual and to-be-expected courtesy. He could drink it or not, as he liked. He was interested in the performance and in what was going on around him. He was smiling with genuine pleasure upon the pretty girl babies of a city he dominated for England with so kindly a feeling that he would not have realised that it was domination. I am sure he had no thought that night of enmity or distrust. He drank his coffee with a free and unthinking gesture, as he would have taken after-dinner coffee in the house of a friend.

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I make this explanation, which I believe to be absolutely correct, because I have been asked so often, Why—*why* did he do it?

Why? Because he was a gentleman and, as a gentleman naturally would on such an occasion, he had relaxed for the moment a necessarily rigid vigilance.

I should like to say, too, that to me it seems very strange that I should be writing all this. It was by the merest chance that I was there—his guest when he died—and through it all I felt, as I feel now, curiously like an intruder upon the scene of a great historic event with which, if there be an eternal fitness of things, I could have no possible connection.

He was buried with spectacular simplicity.

A deep silence lay upon the town. The street through which his body was carried to the North Gate was banked on either side to the very roofs with a dark-robed multitude of men and women, who seemed not to move at all and who spoke in whispers.

Outside the walls, in the midst of illimitable reaches of blank desolation, they have made a new cemetery for British dead, and from the North Gate a roadway is flung out to it in a wide curve round an area of pitted and city-disturbed desert.

This roadway was lined with Indian troops, standing at ease, when I passed through with the American consul. We went on to the bleak, unbelievable cemetery, in which there are always rows upon rows of ready and waiting graves, and stood with the representatives of all the divisions of the army and all the services of war, beside the grave that had been prepared for the Army Commander.

And from there we watched the slow approach of the sad burden, draped in the folds of the Union Jack and carried aloft from the North Gate on the shoulders of men.



Photo, Elliot & Fry

Lieutenant-General Sir William Marshall.

THE LAST POST

In the stillness of the desert we could hear the subdued commands of officers and the quiet, precise salute—‘Present! *Arms!*’—rustling wave on wave, rank by rank, down the long unbroken columns of the honour guard.

Slowly, reverently, they lowered the coffin to the trestle over the grave, then—a low, sweet monotone of prayer floating out over the bowed heads of a uniformed and war-accoutred throng—‘dust to dust’—the peace and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ for evermore—the last rifle volleys and, finally, the reverberating blare of many trumpets rolling out across the boundless grey waste the heart-chilling melody of the ‘Last Post.’

It is a desert burial-ground far from the Homeland. He lies in the circular centre space that was left as a site for a monument, and he will lie there always—Maude of Baghdad. And over his grave the monument will one day be raised—to him and to his army that is with him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AND THEN

I CANNOT believe that any one took up again the burden of ‘the day’s work’ at that day’s end without a sense of added burden. But, after all it was just that one more of England’s men had died. England’s men would *carry on*.

Lieut.-General Sir William Marshall, then corps commander on the eastern front, was appointed to succeed General Maude in full command of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, and, because of my own tremendous interest in all that has been done and is being done in Mesopotamia, because I had come to realise the importance of the Mesopotamian zone in the great scheme of world-defence. I was glad to be able to associate General Marshall in my own mind with General Maude’s expressed opinion of him.

I was going out one day to have luncheon with him at his field headquarters on the eastern front, and to see what could be shown to me in his sphere of operations—forty miles or more across the desert to the northeastward from Baghdad. The evening before, General Maude was discussing with me at dinner, as he always did, the details of the plans that had been made for me.

‘You are going to-morrow,’ he said, ‘to visit a far better soldier than I am.’

It was a startling remark, but if I had had any impulse to make a banal response his perfect seriousness would have checked it.

‘That is generous of you,’ I replied.

‘Generous? Not at all! Merely intelligent.

AND THEN

He 's a splendid officer. Wish I were half as capable. But this being an office man——! I envy him his service in the field. A man likes to be with the troops, you know. When I was a division commander I had my best days. Best I ever had or ever will have. But don't you forget what I tell you about General Marshall. He 's a great soldier.'

General Marshall assumed temporary command while the big fight was being made for General Maude's life. Then came the day when the drums were muffled and the guns were made to speak their measured, heart-chilling tribute to the dead, but—it was as though the armies lost never a step. General Marshall had taken up the burden.

The Army Commander's last order was :

'Carry on !'

An order to be obeyed !

After a few days I started back down the river Tigris—a long journey : back past the historic landmarks ; past the looming Arch of Ctesiphon ; past old Kut of thrilling memories and new Kut of the bright lights and the never-ending toil ; past the ghastly waste of Sunnaiyat ; past Amara with its acres of hospitals ; past marching-posts at the river's edge ; through the vast silence of the great desert where the tents of Bedouin encampments show black against the burning lights of sunset ; past the unending procession of boats carrying supplies up-river to the far-away armies ; round the wonderful Devil's Elbow in the amazing Narrows ; past Ezra's tomb with its blue dome lifted under a bending, caressing palm-tree ; past the un-Eden-like Garden of Eden ; and so—once more into the broad Shatt-el-Arab and back again at the house on the Bund where live [the officers of the Lines of Communication.]

Then a trip up the Euphrates to the British position at Nasriyeh, an expedition into the desert to

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the mounded ruins of Ur of the Chaldees, and the date came round which had been fixed in my mind as the limit of my stay in the Land of the Two Rivers.

But with characteristic generosity, and over the heads of the omnipotent powers, the I.G.C. decided that I should have two days more in order that might witness the decoration of an Arabian knight with the Grand Cross of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire.

This honour had been conferred upon His Excellency the Sheikh of Muhammerah, and the ceremony of investiture was to take place at his river-side palace down on the Shatt-el-Arab.

It does not seem fitting, does it, that Arab chieftains should live in palaces ? They should dwell instead in the wilds of a wind-swept desert under wide-spreading tents of camels' hair and goatskin, hung within with priceless carpets and the colourful fabrics of one's ideal East. But the Arab chieftains are in many ways modern and 'forward-looking' men, Sir Khazal Khan, Sheikh of Muhammerah, being the principal leader in the Arab advance, under British direction, towards better conceptions of life and civilisation.

Even so, he has surrendered none of the ancient usages of his people, nor has he suffered any reduction or modification of his Oriental picturesqueness.

Though in a measure he has, come to think of it. The public apartments of his great palace are furnished for the most part with plush-upholstered 'parlour suites' and other Occidental abominations.

The party from Basra was to go down to the palace on H.M.S. *Lawrence*, as guests of Admiral D. St. A. Wake, C.B., who was in command of the fleet in the Persian Gulf. But when the Sheikh learned that he had invited some women there was a considerable to-do about it. Women ? Impossible ! His Excellency demurred with the utmost

AND THEN

vehemence and declared it to be quite out of the question that women should be included among the witnesses of the momentous ceremony. How could they be ? Never in his life had he received a woman in his palace, and now, if ever, the eyes of his people were upon him. All his own wives were veiled and hidden away behind the latticed windows of his harem ; not even his favourite wife could be present ; and if there were to be women invited there should be women to receive them. No, the customs of his people would have to be respected. He was very sorry, but he was quite sure the foreign ladies would understand.

The foreign ladies had a friend at court. The D.P.C. had gone down a day in advance of the party to put the Sheikh through a rehearsal and to make preliminary arrangements for the occasion, and he put in a strong plea for us. I can imagine his method of procedure. His argument would have been that it was an unique occasion, and for that reason His Excellency might safely yield a point to foreign customs without fear of incurring the displeasure of his own people. And since the D.P.C. was an old friend, I can hear him adding :

‘ Besides, why be so old-fashioned ? ’

It took the Sheikh quite a while to make up his mind, but finally he gave in. Then he decided that as long as he was breaking precedents it would be as well to make a thorough job of it, and on his own initiative he invited the two foreign women at Muhammerah and the wives of the men who live at Abadan and carry on the great business of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company.

The palace is about twenty miles down the Shatt-el-Arab from Basra, while Abadan is about twenty miles farther on, with the town of Muhammerah lying half-way between them at the mouth of the Karun River.

We had to be about betimes that morning,

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because the Admiral said the *Lawrence* would have to up-anchor shortly after eight. It was to be a ceremony in the King's name, so nothing could be left to chance. We should have to be down time to see that the scene was properly set and that all preparations were completed.

It was chillingly cold, the kind of cold that penetrates to one's chill-centres, but lacks even suggestion of invigorating snap. And the sky was overcast with low-hanging clouds, the first any of us had seen for more than eight months !

'Just our luck,' said the General, 'to have chosen for our big show the first rainy day in modern times. Do hope it holds off until we get through.'

The General was thinking of personal comfort at the moment, while the Admiral, who also had his eye on the weather, was probably interested in the acre or so of bunting he had out on the *Lawrence*.

But we learned afterward that the Sheikh had greeted the cloudy morning with joy and thank giving, and that he had spent the whole of it watching the signs overhead and praying that something might come of them. His people were threatened with famine because of the fearful drought. The fields were parched ; the crops were dried up ; no kind of planting could be undertaken ; and even the date-gardens were suffering because the water in the rivers was so abnormally low that irrigation had become meagre and difficult. If the rain would only begin on this great day when he was being so tremendously honoured by the King, Emperor of England and India, his people would regard it as a benediction from Allah on High, and his prestige would be immeasurably enhanced. All in the point of view !

A quaint old ship is the *Lawrence*—built away back sometime in the nineteenth century. She has high decks and a curious square-cut stern, the ports in which look like tiny cottage windows.

AND THEN

They are draped with tassel-bordered curtains caught back with silken cords. She looks little enough like a fighting-ship, but she mounts some fine modern guns, nevertheless, and in connection with recent events she has been exceedingly useful. Everybody loves her.

And she did look gay and festive that morning. Under an awning of the flags of the Allied nations, which was stretched over the after deck, the Admiral had spread many rugs and had set chairs and couches in *tête-à-tête* and other nice arrangements to make a place of reception and comfort for his guests, while round a gun a hollow-square luncheon table had been built and gaily decorated. The Admiral's part in the programme was to be the firing of a salute at the conclusion of the ceremony.

The unwieldy old gunboat made a very difficult way through the too numerous craft of all kinds lying at anchor or moving swiftly about in the river at Basra ; then slowly enough we slipped down the twenty miles of wide channel, past the date-plantations, grey and drooping with an accumulated burden of dust ; past a dozen and one narrow, enticing creeks where one knew the orioles and kingfishers were playing in the tangled vines ; past the ships the Turks sank to no purpose in the stream ; and past an up-river procession of cargo-carriers, troopships, and hospital ships from overseas. As the morning wore on the clouds gathered in banks along the south-west horizon, and the chill in the air began to give way before the warming-up processes of the sun.

‘ It isn't going to rain, after all,’ said the General. He was to make the great speech in the King's name, and was marching up and down the deck, practising it, much, I would say, after the manner of a big, overgrown schoolboy.

“ ‘ In the name of His Majesty, the King-Emperor—— ! ’ Oh, hang it all ! “ In recognition of

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your valued——” I say, I wish somebody else had to do this ! But I’m not going to read it ; I’m going to speak it !’

He could have extemporised quite freely and easily, but the speech had to be written, and spoken as it was written, because it would have to be translated into Persian for the benefit of the Sheikh, who speaks no English.

It was a great day for the tribes of Muhammerah, and a greater day for their chief. As we rounded a big bend in the river his palace came into view, and I, for one, was seized with the kind of excitement with which an insane and unsafe Fourth of July used to fill me in my uncareful childhood. The palace was draped in bunting, as our gunboat was, and from corner to corner of the flat roof a thousand pennants and streamers flapped and fluttered and curled in the breeze.

In the river lay the Persian navy. All of it ! And a most unseaworthy-looking old craft it appeared to be. A cruiser of the vintage of about 1888, it was purchased for Persia by some patriotic statesman, no doubt, who needed the difference between what he said he paid for it and what it really cost. Among other things, it lacked a coat of paint, but it lacked nothing in the way of flying banners, while the curious figures crowding its rails were in themselves a triumph in decoration.

I will say at once that from first to last not a joyful sound was uttered ; not a shout ; not a single ‘Hip, hip, hurray !’ or anything equivalent to ‘Hip, hip, hurray !’ Nothing ! It was as though everybody was slightly embarrassed. But the Arabs are not given to vociferousness or to any kind of vocal demonstration. Anything in the way of a roar of jubilation would be quite foreign to them.

We had some difficulty in getting ashore, having to climb from our launch over a line of belums anchored in the mud near the bank, then walk



The grave of General Maude.

AND THEN

across a narrow, slippery gang-plank to a more slippery landing at the bottom of the stone steps which led up to the arched entrance to the garden. At the top of these steps stood a number of most important-looking men who wore smart European clothes and Persian turbans. The D.P.C. was there to do the introducing for us and to smooth away for them the rough edges of novel social contact, and we were passed from one to another, our names going before us, until we came to the Sheikh himself, who stood just within the garden, surrounded by his official household.

By us I mean the unwelcome—but most graciously welcomed—women of the party. The General and the Admiral, with their staff-officers, remained on the *Lawrence* to come ashore a little later with proper pomp and ceremony.

I shook hands with the Sheikh, noticing with considerable satisfaction that he ‘looked the part,’ and then walked on, as I was directed, down a long flag pavement, on either side of which was drawn up a double line of Arab riflemen, standing at ease. I could not think of them as soldiers. They looked like comic-opera brigands ‘dressing’ the stage for the entrance of the barytone. The barytone would be the brigand chief, of course, while the tenor would have been captured and thrown into a dungeon behind the frowning walls of the great palace.

We followed the pavement round the main building and came to a flight of steps leading up into the Durbar hall. Both these steps and the pavement for quite a distance were covered with rich Persian rugs, while the balcony skirting the long hall was not only carpeted, but was hung with flags and pennants innumerable.

It may have been the general sumptuousness of things ; it may have been the courtly manners of the Sheikh’s *Wazir* and the tall Arab gentlemen who received us—I do not know ; but my Fourth

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of July sensations gave way to something else—a kind of stiffness about the knees and a feeling that my natural dignity was not quite enough, and that I ought to try to muster a little more from somewhere. The way you feel when you meet royalty—if you ever do!

The Durbar hall, or ceremonial chamber, is a recent addition to the palace, and looks as though it might have cost the Sheikh a tidy sum, though if His Excellency should engage me as stage-manager and scene-shifter in the theatre of his picturesque activities I think I should put the stamp of my approval on his walls and priceless carpets and on literally nothing else. The walls, decorated with a wide stucco frieze of warlike figures which might have been carved by Nebuchadnezzar's head sculptor for a palace in ancient Babylon, were completely fascinating, while the floor was covered with just one vast carpet of a depth of pile and a richness of tone not to be described.

Down the middle of the room lay a long table covered with fine linen, and 'groaning' under a display of gold and silver plate, and a bewildering variety of colourful sweets and other light refreshments, while the tufty and tasselly sofas and chairs and other upholstered articles of Occidental ease were ranged along in a straight line near either wall, just under the wonderful frieze.■

The chairs of ceremony were three—for His Excellency, the General, and the Admiral; above them hung a portrait of King George which would convict that royal gentleman of a vast indifference with regard to what people think of his looks. Behind the General's chair stood a small table on which, in an open velvet case, were displayed the insignia with which the Sheikh was to be invested.

Suddenly an unbelievable kind of band—the Sheikh's own, which proves how progressive he is

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—began to play ‘God Save the King’ in wild and quaintly flourished wails, and presently into the hall marched His Excellency, followed by the General and the Admiral and a fine array of British staff-officers. I do not know what became of the staff-officers. I suppose they dropped on bits of upholstery here and there. I was busy watching the principal actors. They came on down past the long table, seated themselves with deliberate dignity, and the impressive ceremony began.

The General was in excellent form. He held his written speech in his hand, but did not refer to it, so I fancy there were a few differences between what he said and what was later read to the Sheikh in Persian translation. But I confess to a real thrill when he said, very gravely, ‘In the name of His Majesty, the King-Emperor . . .’ and proceeded to hang upon the handsome person of His Excellency the insignia of his new and splendid honour.

First came the ribbon, a broad band of royal purple; then the jewelled cross; and finally the golden chain which clinked against the cross with a clink that must have stirred the soul of the fine old Arab as nothing had in many a day.

He was on the right side in the world war, but in his way he had taken a mighty risk. If the Turks had won—not a vestige of him or of anything he stood for would have been left on the face of the earth. Without a doubt it would have been the gallows, the holocaust, and the sword for him and his. He had had the temerity to uphold an ancient alliance made by his fathers before him, and it seemed to me that he deserved well at the hands of his British allies. It is not to be forgotten that he is Persian and that his territories were invaded by the Turkish-German army.

I shall remember him always as he stood up to listen to the Persian translation of the speech of investiture. He wore a magnificent Persian robe

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which reached almost to his feet, and his rather handsome old head, with its thin black locks, was bare. Across his breast lay the ribbon and the chain, while beneath them gleamed the jewelled and enamelled cross. It took fifteen minutes to read the speech, but not once did he move nor lower his eyes from the far-away somewhere on which they were fixed.

Haji Rais-ul-Tujjar, the Sheikh's *Wazir*, or Prime Minister, read the speech, and Haji Rais is a wonderful little man. Most Arabs are tall and stately. High-class Arabs, that is. But Haji Rais is not. He is only about five feet five, but he makes up in loftiness of intelligence what he lacks in physical stature. His is the commanding intellect which has stood at the Sheikh's right hand for more years than most people can remember. He is only about seventy years old, but an impression seems to prevail among people generally that he is at least one hundred and seventy. He is very active, and is said to be the only Arab extant who never wastes anybody's time.

He is a very rich and powerful merchant, with interests extending throughout Persia and Mesopotamia, and when he has business to transact with a foreigner he does it in the fewest possible words then picks up his inevitable little black portfolio of papers and runs along. The 'ul-Tujjar' in his name means 'chief of merchants.' Which doesn't sound the least like a description of an Arab, does it? An earnest little man is Haji Rais, and he reads the General's speech up over the tall Sheikh's shoulder as though he thought a good deal of emphasis and a few dramatic pauses would have a desirable effect.

As soon as the speeches were finished the guns of the *Lawrence* began to boom. They knew on the *Lawrence* how to fire a salute, and the measured precision of it inflicted nothing upon one in the nature of a nervous strain. But the response from

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one of the Sheikh's old cannon would have served to convince the most self-controlled that he needed either a rest cure or a tonic.

There are eleven fairly sizable guns bristling round the palace, but only two of them are capable of making a noise, and it was painfully evident that the Arabs who had been entrusted with the important duty of responding to the British salute had relied on luck with a too complete and uninquiring confidence. It took them fifteen minutes to fire twelve guns, the intervals being anything from three seconds to five full minutes. One lost count, but while it was going on there was nothing to do but sit perfectly quiet—or try to.

Then the colourful refreshments were passed around, along with coffee served in exquisite cups set in holders of gold filigree. One of the women from Abadan said she knew a Persian princess who always served coffee in cups like that, and expected her guests to take them away as souvenirs. I hardly think the Sheikh lost any of his, but if I had known that Persian princess I should have wanted to drink coffee at her expense at least twelve times.

I begged a swift launch from the General—the one in which the D.P.C. had made the trip down from Basra—and decided to linger behind my party, see some more of the Sheikh and his fascinating environment, then go on down to Muhammerah town and run back up-river in the late afternoon. The D.P.C. would go back on the *Lawrence*.

This little supplementary programme for myself appealed to my sense of the fitness of things, whereas sitting down to luncheon with my own kind on a gunboat's deck did not appeal to me in the least.

But it is necessary that I should stop now. Otherwise I should go on and tell about the inner

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mysteries of the palace ; about the harem ; about some amazing barbaric decorations in inner courts, and some more wonderful carpets ; about underground hot-weather rooms furnished for the utmost in luxurious, somnolent ease ; and about some interesting and sporting young sons of the Sheikh—all of which and whom he showed me himself while he rather nervously fingered the ribbon and the gold chain which hung about his neck.

But what I really want to tell is about getting back up-river. Time sped so swiftly that I didn't realise its passing, and when I suddenly glanced at my watch I found it was half-past five. By that time I was with the British consul and his wife in the depths of the bazaar of old Muhammerah, gaily bargaining with a good-natured Persian over a beautifully wrought silver-sheathed dagger which I longed to possess.

And I am sure that glancing at my watch cost me at least five dollars. In another two minutes he would have split the difference with me. But I was so startled that I said, 'Oh, here !' Then he got the money and I got the dagger.

There I was with nothing but a shell of a launch—as it seemed to me—to travel in, and Basra more than thirty miles away ! And it would be dark in another half-hour !

My two khaki-clad Britishers at the engine and the wheel were not particularly pleased with me. I could see that. And then I made the mistake of saying, as I climbed aboard :

'I'm afraid I'm a little late,' rather twirling the '*late*.' It was the kind of apology that would make any normal man want to lay violent hands on somebody or something, but my pilot looked down upon me from his six feet or more of magnificent muscularity and said :

'Well, it 'u'd be all right if we had any lights !' And I rather thought he twirled the '*lights*.'

Good Heavens ! And we had those sunken

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Turkish ships to get round, while farther up toward Basra the river would be crowded with rapidly moving craft of every kind, to say nothing of ships and mahaylas and dhows innumerable lying at anchor. Well, there was nothing else for it ! I had to get home !

We swung down the two miles of the Karun River and out into the broad Shatt-el-Arab. I have said it was a swift launch. It was. It could make twenty-five miles an hour at ordinary speed, and that kind of speed in a shallow launch is terrifying even in broad daylight.

I said nothing, however, and even if I had spoken I could not have been heard above the noise of the engine and the wild wash of the high foaming wake that we left behind us. I just sat tight in my deep willow chair and looked and looked. I tried to love the date-gardens along the banks that I had learned to love so much, and the occasional glimpses I caught of the far-flung desert stretching away beyond the palm-fringes and the low-lying, salt-whitened marshes.

But the serenity had departed from my Mesopotamian world, and love for it had turned to a kind of fearsome thrill. Up from the south-west rolled with incredible swiftness a bank of amber cloud streaked with black and edged with the orange of the desert sunset. The first tremendous flash of lightning shot through it in the last faint glow of day, and in the darkness it left behind our moiling wake shone ghostly green with vivid phosphorescence.

Then black night fell. The green path streaked away behind us and green ripples rolled away on either side to break in little flecks of light against the near bank. Jagged forks of unbelievable lightning cut great gashes in the dense black overhead and down the slope of the sky, while thunder crashed and rumbled incessantly.

When we came up to the edge of the traffic area we had to slow down. We had to feel our way

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darkly, in fact, with our motor-horn constantly sounding. And then it was that the rain descended upon us. It was not rain ; it was a deluge.

Shelter ? No, not out on the broad bosom of Shatt-el-Arab in a little open launch. But nob minded that. The rains had begun. It was first drop that had fallen in Mesopotamia for more than eight months. The thirsty land would drink it up and begin to bubble and seethe, and British army would soon be mired to its knees. But in the eyes of his people the prestige of Khazal Khan, Sheikh of Muhammerah, Knight Commander and wearer of the Grand Cross of Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire, would be immeasurably enhanced.

The next afternoon I went back down the Shatt-el-Arab on a troopship, leaving with keen regret that amazing land wherein an invading army of right-minded men has done and continues to do such extraordinary things.

THE END

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